

# TIME TO TEACH TIME TO LEARN

Report on the Evaluation of Outcomes Assessment  
and Reporting in NSW Government Schools

*November 2003*



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**TIME TO TEACH**

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Report on the Evaluation of Outcomes Assessment  
and Reporting in NSW Government Schools

*November 2003*



# The University of Sydney

NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA

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25 August 2003

Dr Andrew Refshauge MP  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education and Training  
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs  
GPO Box 3451  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Dr Refshauge

It is with great pleasure that I forward to you copies of the *Report on the Evaluation of Outcomes Assessment and Reporting in NSW Government Schools*, which has been given the title ***Time To Teach – Time to Learn***. The Evaluation was commissioned by your predecessor, John Watkins MP.

For me this has been a very interesting experience as I have been able to revisit aspects of schooling I first researched in 1987 when I completed a Report on Assessment Practices in Years 11 and 12 for the then NSW Board of Senior School Studies. It has been particularly exciting to have this opportunity to review and report on what has happened in government schools since I completed the Report *Focusing on Learning* in 1995 for the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon John Aquilina. It seems I have been writing on an eight-year cycle since 1987.

The cooperation we have had from schools and their communities has been outstanding. As we point out in our Report, we were given a warm reception throughout and those we talked to were very pleased to have the opportunity to respond to our questions.

Our thanks go to your Department for all the assistance we received. I trust that we have done justice to those who gave so willingly of their time and professional expertise. I am sure that the Report has relevance not just for government schools but for the education sector more widely.

In forwarding this Report to you I also wish to offer special thanks to my colleague Associate Professor Stephen Crump. We have managed the Evaluation along with our usual busy schedules and his support and cooperation have been very instrumental in our being able to complete the Report in quick time.

Finally, if it is felt that benefit can be gained from our further involvement I should be very pleased to discuss the possibilities as to what might constitute appropriate follow-up activities.

Yours sincerely

  
K J Eltis

attach

# Foreword

The Evaluation being reported on had its origins late in 2002 when the NSW Teachers Federation approached the then Minister for Education and Training, the Hon John Watkins MP, with the request that a study be undertaken of demands created for teachers as a result of the introduction of outcomes assessment and reporting. The Minister agreed that an Evaluation should take place and asked if I would conduct the study, having completed a similar exercise in 1995. Agreement was reached on Terms of Reference and Associate Professor Stephen Crump from the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney agreed to work with me. We began our work in February 2003.

This Report presents the findings of our Evaluation and concludes with a set of Recommendations. It will be obvious from a reading of our findings that much excellent work is occurring in our schools and teachers and their principals are to be commended on the efforts they have made to manage the complex issues arising from new practices in relation to outcomes assessment and reporting.

There are, however, problems needing to be addressed, not the least of which is the clear specification of just what is mandatory for teachers in relation to curriculum assessment and reporting outcomes, and where they have more freedom. A major conclusion from the Evaluation is that whatever approaches we adopt to improve the curriculum and reporting practices, ample time must still be there for teachers to show creativity and innovation in their teaching, and for students to explore in detail what it is they are being asked to learn so that they find excitement in the challenges presented to them. Hence the title of our Report is *Time to Teach – Time to Learn*. We must avoid the danger of over-prescription while ensuring that the curriculum remains rigorous. These considerations have been kept in mind when the Recommendations were being framed.

We thank the many people who have contributed to this study. Their contribution has come in many ways: involvement in school visits, written submissions, oral presentations, responses to a web survey. The enthusiastic, honest and insightful responses we received guided the work of the Evaluation. I trust that our response has not failed those who so willingly contributed.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleague Stephen Crump for his splendid assistance during the Evaluation. My thanks also go to Gavin Patterson from the NSW Department of Education and Training for the way he managed so much of the logistical planning of the Evaluation. Thank you, too, to Lisa Jane Kenny who served as our Research Assistant.

It will be noted that there is no Executive Summary to the Report. The approach has been adopted of writing the final section, Section 5, *Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations* as a stand-alone Section. A reading of Section 5 will make it possible to gain a clear picture of the background to the Evaluation and the factors considered in preparing the Recommendations.

K J Eltis  
25 August 2003



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# Glossary of terms

To assist readers not totally familiar with the educational scene in NSW, the following glossary of terms has been developed.

AASE	Australian Association of Special Education (NSW Chapter)
Assessment Driven	Learning and teaching that is driven by assessment rather than curriculum planning and implementation
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
Basic Skills Tests (BST)	The Basic Skills Testing program is State-wide and examines aspects of Literacy and numeracy in Years 3 and 5, as well as Computer Skills in Year 6
Child Protection Legislation	Mandatory Child Protection Policy of the NSW Government
Count Me In Too (CMIT)	A professional development project in numeracy currently operating in NSW
CTJ	Consistency of Teacher Judgement is a professional development package to assist teachers to improve their judgement of student work
Crowded Curriculum	A curriculum that has too many competing demands
DEETYA	Commonwealth Department for Employment Education and Youth Affairs (now DEST)
DEST	Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training
DET	NSW Department of Education and Training
Education Queensland	Queensland's State Education Department
ELLA	English Language and Learning Assessment tests
Eltis Review	A review by Professor Ken Eltis 1995 'Focus on Learning: Report of the Review of Outcomes and Profiles in NSW Schooling'
HSC	Higher School Certificate (NSW Year 12 matriculation public examination)
ICT	Information Communication Technology
Indicators	An indicator is a statement of behaviour that student might display as they work towards the achievement of syllabus outcomes.
KLA	Key Learning Area for Primary and Secondary Schools

MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.
“New Basics”	A four year trial by Education Queensland of new ‘curriculum organisers’, ‘productive pedagogies’ and ‘rich tasks’
NSW Board of Studies	The authority responsible for producing syllabuses in the Key Learning Areas for all NSW schools
NSW Teachers Federation	The union of government teachers in New South Wales
OASIS	A software package operating on ‘stand alone’ computers in all NSW Government schools to service Administration, Finance, Library and Timetabling
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
Outcomes	Syllabus outcomes are specific statements of the results intended by the syllabus for each Stage
PDHPE	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education key learning area
Productive Pedagogies	Productive Pedagogies are intended to enhance teacher practice in the areas of recognition of difference, connectedness, intellectual quality and supportive classroom environment
Public Schools	Government Schools in NSW
SNAP	Secondary Numeracy Assessment Program tests
Stage Statements	Describe what students typically know and can do as a consequence of having undertaken the syllabus content prescribed in each Stage
Stages of Learning	The Board of Studies defines seven broad Stages of learning from Early Stage One to Stage Six
Syllabus documents	Documents issued in the Key Learning Areas by Board of Studies NSW
STEMS	School Transition Enterprise Management System: A system used to track student progress across Stages
SENA	Schedule for Early Number Assessment: Test given to assess early number skills.
Syllabuses	Syllabuses contain the aims, outcomes and content of what is to be taught in the K-12 years in NSW.
Vinson Inquiry	<i>Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in New South Wales, Report of the ‘Vinson Inquiry’</i> , an inquiry into government schools, undertaken between September 2001 and September 2002 by Tony Vinson (Chair).

# 1. Background to the evaluation

## Introduction

In October 2002 the NSW Teachers Federation raised with the former Minister of Education and Training, the Hon. John Watkins MP, the issue of increased teachers' workload in relation to school-based assessing and reporting practices. Their discussion resulted in an agreement between the NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Department of Education and Training that an independent evaluation should be undertaken to examine and report on the impact of different approaches to outcomes assessing and reporting in NSW government schools. Professor Ken Eltis, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sydney, agreed to undertake this Evaluation, assisted by Associate Professor Stephen Crump from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney. The Evaluation formally got under way in February 2003.

It was seen as very timely that, after almost seven years of implementation of the original 1995 Eltis Report *Focusing on Learning: Report of the Review of Outcomes and Profiles in New South Wales Schooling*, an evaluation of the impact of the recommendations in that Report be made. In particular, the Evaluation was asked to focus on Recommendation 13 in the original Report, which related to assessment and reporting practices. That Recommendation stated:

- schools and their communities be responsible for devising their own procedures, with opportunities for community members to express views and indicate their expectations in relation to reporting, taking into account issues such as:
  - the need for assessment and reporting practices to be time-efficient, and not detract from teaching and learning
  - acknowledging differences in terms of the development of individual children
  - the general well-being of the student
  - standards of comparison to enable parents to know how their children are progressing
  - diagnosis of areas of strength and need, including those where students might be given additional support
- support be given to schools during 1996 through the provision of thoroughly considered guidelines and options, which assist in the development of reporting procedures, and give indications of what constitutes valid, reliable, informative and manageable reporting to parents (p. 93).

The Terms of Reference for the Evaluation reflect concerns surrounding assessment, recording and reporting using outcomes, as discussed between the then Minister and the NSW Teachers Federation.

## 1.1 Terms of reference for the evaluation

The Evaluation was given the following brief:

In addition to clarifying and restating the educational value of an outcomes approach to improving teaching and learning, the evaluation will:

- assess the impact different approaches to recording and reporting have had on the workload of primary teachers;
- assess the extent to which such approaches acknowledge the primacy of teachers' professional judgement;
- identify the features and characteristics of best practice models;
- assess the clarity and usefulness of various models of reporting to parents;
- provide advice about the nature of support required to promote best practice within the context of a manageable workload; and,
- provide advice on the implications for school-based assessment, recording and reporting in Years 7 to 10.

A Reference Group was established to meet with Professor Eltis and Associate Professor Crump during the Evaluation. The Reference Group included representatives from the NSW Teachers Federation, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, the Office of the Board of Studies, the NSW Primary Principals' Association, the NSW Secondary Principals' Council, the Public Schools Principals Forum and a member from the Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate NSW Department of Education and Training.

The Evaluation gathered information from various sources:

- visits to a sample of government schools across NSW;
- a review of approaches to assessment and reporting in other States and overseas;
- a web-based survey of principals, teachers and parents;
- oral submissions from peak groups;
- written responses from schools, organisations and individuals; and,
- discussion with experts in their area of assessment and testing practice.

The Evaluation was seen as complementing "the red-tape reduction plan" which is one of the strategies in the policy *Quality Teaching: Labor's Plan for Professional Support for Teachers* (from a paper prepared by the Australian Labor Party for the NSW State Election, March 2003). This Plan is designed to reduce the paper work that may interfere with good teaching. The Government's commitment to a red-tape reduction plan suggested the development of "new templates and examples to help teachers...(with) some assessment and reporting tasks".

## Tasks

With the above background, the Evaluation set out to investigate, consult and report on:

1. school assessment and reporting practices using outcomes;
2. workload of teachers in using outcomes for teaching, assessing, recording and reporting;
3. the use of teacher professional judgment to assess and moderate student work;
4. materials provided to schools by the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Board of Studies NSW, including syllabuses and support documents;
5. teachers', parents' and students' understanding of outcomes assessment and reporting;
6. the use of technology to support assessment, recording and reporting;
7. the professional support for teachers provided by the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training;
8. various forms of best practice models of assessment, recording and reporting;
9. possible avenues for further action and review in the above areas, including the relationship between school-based assessment and reporting procedures and system-wide testing programs like Basic Skills Testing, the English Language and Learning Assessment (ELLA) tests, and the Secondary Numeracy Assessment Program (SNAP) tests.

## 1.2 Definitions and terminology

The following definitions and terminology have been as a backdrop to the discussion in this Report.

### K–10 standards framework

The Board's syllabuses indicate the continuity and developmental sequence of learning in a subject or key learning area. The knowledge, skills and understanding that students are expected to acquire at each Stage of the learning area/subject constitute the syllabus standards. Syllabus standards provide focus and direction for teaching and learning.

### Stage statements

Stage statements describe what students typically know and can do as a consequence of having undertaken the syllabus content prescribed in the Stage.

### Syllabus outcomes

"Syllabus outcomes are specific statements of the results intended by the syllabus. These outcomes are achieved as students engage with the content of the syllabus.... The outcomes are statements of knowledge, skills and understandings to be achieved by most students as a result of effective teaching and learning by the end of the Stage... Learning however occurs at different rates and in different ways. Therefore, there will be variability on the achievement of Stage outcomes during particular years of schooling." (taken from *Mathematics K-6 Syllabus*, 2002, p. 18).



## Indicators

In K-6 syllabuses, “each outcome... is accompanied by a sample set of indicators. An indicator is a statement of the behaviour that students might display as they work towards the achievement of syllabus outcomes. The indicators ... are examples only. They assist teachers to monitor student progress within a Stage and to make informed judgements about the achievement of outcomes.” (taken from *Human Society and Its Environment K-6 Syllabus*, 1998, p.19).

## 1.3 Enhancing background knowledge

The Evaluation considered it essential to update knowledge of recent Australian and international research on outcomes assessment and reporting, so that the present Report could be located in a broader context. Three major areas were pursued in the research review: teacher workload, teacher judgment, and the role of parents. All were seen as crucial to the present Evaluation.

Also seen as significant for background understanding was a review of the strategies followed by the NSW Department of Education and Training and by the Board of Studies NSW in recent years to implement outcomes assessment and reporting in New South Wales schools.

Section 2 of the Report focuses on these two areas.

## 2. Outcomes assessment and reporting: An update

### Introduction

In 1995, the NSW Review of Outcomes and Profiles adopted as a central theme the view that schooling depends more than ever on the quality and professionalism of teachers. The Review argued that the skills, energy and motivation teachers bring to their work need to be incorporated in strategic planning for future directions in education policy. In reviewing the work of teachers, the Report *Focusing on Learning* (1995) wanted to draw attention to how the many conflicting demands impacting on teachers in the early 1990s were affecting the thrust of their daily work and to bring back into prominence the prime function of their professional endeavour. Devolution of school management had created a number of diversions of energy and time away from the classroom, but even in the area of curriculum schools were struggling with a range of issues emanating from decisions taken as part of the then “national statements and profiles” initiatives. The 1995 Review sought to simplify the complex and conflicting issues facing teachers and set the agenda for a sharper focus on classroom practice and student activity.

The task set for the 2003 Evaluation was to conduct a rigorous and practical review of the ‘good and the not so good’ that had happened in the intervening years. The question, fairly asked, was whether some things had been left undone following the Eltis Report of 1995, and what needed to be done to take outcomes assessment and reporting forward. Anecdotally, primary teachers appeared to be happy with using an “outcomes approach”, but were concerned about assessment and reporting demands and questioned whether there was an appropriate overarching rationale to what they were being asked to do. In addition, work on syllabuses and support materials since 1995 had added a number of new dimensions to the outcomes approach adopted for NSW schools, including a ‘standards framework’ for syllabuses and the significant introduction of a new Higher School Certificate with its attendant assessment and reporting regime. These important new elements in teachers’ work have added substance to the ongoing debate. As well, the increase in system-wide testing at key stages of schooling has also created new issues needing to be addressed.

This Evaluation assumed that, while it could find variable practice, as in any reform, there would be many examples where schools had managed outcomes assessment and reporting effectively, were creatively solving problems, and were renewing their professional enthusiasm and integrity through engaging with this initiative. We were not disappointed. The presentation of the data elsewhere in this Report clearly reflects the professional way teachers have continued to pursue the use of outcomes as a basis of their teaching and their reporting to parents. It is on these strengths that we need to build.

Thus, again, this Report has as its major focus the work teachers do in relation to teaching and learning in our classrooms. It also highlights the competing pressures confronted by teachers as they go about their work. In re-asserting this focus on teaching and learning, the Report supplements the work recently begun on developing a model of pedagogy for NSW government schools, under the title *Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools*. The ‘quality teaching’ model, directed at enhancing the outcomes from teaching, is not in conflict with the eventual Recommendations of this Evaluation. However, implementation of the model will need to be carefully considered as part of a suite of reforms currently under way, including teacher education and professional standards, consistency of teachers’ judgments, assessment in the early years of schooling, a revised Years 7-10 (Stages 4 and 5) curriculum, the re-structure of the NSW Department of Education and Training, and national policy initiatives (see Section 5) started by the *Adelaide Declaration* (1999).

Carpenter (2000, p. 385) claimed that “many good ideas die for lack of adequate time, effort, and funding. The teacher must respond to every fad of the academic community and, increasingly, to every passing fancy of the legislature”. Little wonder that the Evaluation argues that quality teaching will depend on getting clear and unambiguous direction for government schools about outcomes assessment and reporting, so that teachers have adequate time to manage what is asked of them and the inclination for them to feel there exists a “fad mentality” is overcome.

It is through purposeful teaching that we promote learning in our students. Teachers who participated in this Evaluation were unanimous that this was why they were there in the first place – they want to promote learning amongst their students. In seeking to change what happens in schools, teachers need clear and well-argued reasons to change. The 1995 Report provided a brief history of profiles and outcomes in education, drawing on research current at the time to explain the impetus and research base for an outcomes approach to teaching. This section of the current Report provides an update on that research, beginning with national and international experiences, before reviewing support offered to schools since 1995 and some concluding comments.

## 2.1 Defining outcomes

A major issue addressed in the 1995 Review was the meaning of ‘outcomes’. This issue is important because the origins of ‘outcomes’ arose from work on outcomes-based education [OBE] which involves a much broader context than that intended for NSW schools. As the 1995 Review explained, there are different models of outcomes-based learning in the United States of America, from traditional, through transitional to transformative (Eltis, 1995, p. 14). OBE means different things to different people, both within and across systems, which resulted in controversy in the early 1990s surrounding these educational frameworks (Brandt, 1994(a) and O’Neil, 1994). For NSW schools, “syllabus outcomes are specific statements of the results intended by the syllabus. These outcomes are achieved as students engage with the content of the syllabus ... The outcomes are a statement of the knowledge, skills and understanding to be achieved by most students as a result of effective teaching and learning ... by the end of each Stage” (*Mathematics K-6 Syllabus*, Board of Studies NSW, 2002, p. 18).

The Evaluation recognises that there are other equally valid definitions of ‘outcomes’, such as “a demonstration of learning that occurs at the end of a learning experience. It is a result of learning and a visible, observable demonstration of three things: knowledge, combined with competence, combined with the attitudinal, affective, motivational and relational elements that also make up the performance” (Haydel et al., 1995, p.6). Spady (1994) argued “demonstration is the key word; an outcome is not a score or a grade, but the end product of a clearly defined process that students carry out” (p. 18).

However, as Brandt, 1994(b) has pointed out, simply having the word ‘outcomes’ incorporated in a school’s curriculum does not necessarily mean that the school’s work is outcomes-based. Some of the conflict surrounding outcomes-based education stems from the words used within the various outcomes-based frameworks. Some teachers see little difference in an outcomes-based system except the terminology - now the output rather than the input is mandated (Fritz, 1994). Similarly, Wien and Dudley-Marling (1998, p. 405) have observed the curriculum shifting rhetorically from “what is taught to what is learnt by each student”, therefore altering little in the school environment. In these circumstances, the quality of the syllabus documents becomes important for determining the quality of the learning experiences likely or possible in each classroom.

Another area for linguistic contention is the perceived purpose of education in an outcomes-based framework. For example, Schwarz (1994) claims that “advocates of outcomes-based education use mechanistic terminology suggestive of the business world” (p. 87), not of the classroom and staffroom. Many outcomes statements include the phrase ‘students will’, which, Wien and Dudley-Marling (1998) point out, could be taken to mean all students are to be assessed on all outcomes. They assert “statements like these set out a production schedule, a set time frame, that all students must follow” (p. 407).

In such discussions the positive ideas behind an outcomes-based framework can be ignored or lost. Statements giving directions to teachers can lead to confusion among teachers as to what is mandatory and what is not, so teachers play safe and try to assess all outcomes (or try to ignore the whole issue). Unequivocal advice is important for giving clear direction to schools about expectations and requirements for outcomes assessment and reporting. In this way, it is possible to remove much of the confusion which can arise from debate about purpose and intention, and definition.

## 2.2 International experience

In some countries outcomes-based education claims to have the “capacity to meet the needs of all students regardless of their environment, focus, economic status, or disabling condition...it enables teachers and educators to have a clearer curricular focus, develop better instructional methods, and assess learners’ achievement with precise clarity and validity” (Soudien and Baxen, 1997, p. 452).

Outcomes-based education was developed with the intent that the curriculum could be made much more relevant for all students. However, in some States of America “... very little progress has been made overall in addressing the many equity issues that emerge from efforts to raise the educational standards for all students” (Massell, Kirst and Hoppe, 1997, p. 11). In the case of South Africa, according to Soudien and Baxen (1997), “there is undoubtedly merit in outcomes-based education (OBE) as it seeks to make young people literate in the ways and habits of modernity.” (p. 459). Various factors combine to prevent the achievement of outcomes-based education. It is important to say that isolating contributing factors may be difficult to research. Yet schools with the time, drive and leadership have had great success in creating an outcomes-based curriculum that is appropriate for all their students.

One example is Milestone School in the United Kingdom [UK], a school for students aged two to sixteen years with learning difficulties. Essential ingredients to this success were exemplar activities that met the requirements of the National Curriculum, identification of cross-curricular links, the constant addition of examples of good practice, a whole school approach, and the involvement of all staff (Maddison, 2002). Although equity is often used as a reason for the implementation of outcomes, syllabus documents tend to be written for mainstream students and assume that all students come to school with the same cultural capital (Wien and Dudley-Marling, 1998). This leaves the task of adapting an outcomes curriculum to schools, to suit the ability and equity needs of their own students, as in the case of Milestone school.

Teachers in some States of America reported in a survey conducted by Massell, Kirst and Hoppe (1997, p. 9) that they “regard the state’s standards as only one of many resources they used to generate their own, more detailed curricular guidance policies and programs”. Not all teachers feel that they have this freedom, and the freedom to adapt syllabuses has the potential to become a workload issue if not managed well.

The State has a responsibility to ensure that schools share a common curriculum if equity and other objectives are to be met. Value for the taxpayers’ dollar is another consideration, with duplication of effort often considered by many educators as needlessly ‘re-inventing the wheel’. Massell, Kirst and Hoppe (1997, p.12) argue it is “not desirable for either teachers or administrators to completely reinvent curricula or assessment school by school” as high workload and inconsistency across schools is the result. Too often “change means adding new things, not eliminating old ones. The State must determine how the new and existing fit together, or tell teachers what they must abandon” (Goldman and Conley, 1997, p.19). The importance of these last comments was very apparent in this Evaluation.

Another reason teachers shy away from outcomes-based syllabuses seems to be the high speed at which they are introduced and the low level of support they receive. Evans and King (1994) argue that to restructure a syllabus framework and the underlying beliefs of teachers takes time. In some States of America it took “more than five years to reach consensus on the structure of the standards’ documents and their context” (Massell, Kirst and Hoppe, 1997, p. 4). In the UK, too, “the process of change will almost certainly take a minimum of five years before any significant results are achieved” (Maddison, 2002, p. 27). Professional development is the key. If outcomes assessment and reporting is to be practised as it is portrayed in the literature and policy documents “teachers need access to richer opportunities on an ongoing basis, and they need direction and support from central office staff” (Massell, Kirst and Hoppe, 1997, p. 11).

In New Zealand, value was placed on internal assessment as a means of determining student achievement (Philips, 2000) when outcomes were introduced, and more time for adoption was built into the implementation process by staggering the introduction of syllabuses. Even so “schools felt that the pace of introduction was too swift, particularly as each curriculum statement also set out levels against which students should be assessed” (Wylie, 1999, p. 127). Similarly, the funding provided for professional development in New Zealand was short term (Wylie, 1999). It is difficult for a system to maintain the momentum on one initiative, when there are many initiatives deserving equal levels of support. However, long term cost effectiveness is better served by adequate and sustained funding until there is a measurable difference in what schools do.

Where outcomes-based education is associated with changed pedagogical practices, teachers generally feel that students are receiving higher quality learning experiences. For example, a survey in the United States of America found teachers perceive that student learning has significantly increased as schools are setting higher expectations (Evans and King, 1994). However, there remains a doubt that there is enough evidence of outcomes-based approaches changing pedagogy as well as assessment strategies and practices. When linked to larger curriculum reforms, this issue becomes even murkier. The best example comes from the UK in the 1990s.

## The National Curriculum in England and Wales

In the United Kingdom, the *Education Reform Act 1989* ushered in a National Curriculum as part of a major policy shift towards a re-centralisation of curriculum despite other policies aimed at making schools self-governing and locally responsive. There was some early optimism about a national approach to curriculum, and even some support for a new assessment system that would bring greater national accountability and serve the purposes of the marketisation of education. Grace (1995) observed, with a sense of surprise, “from an historical perspective, the fact that any primary school headteacher should celebrate the arrival of a government imposed national curriculum seems remarkable” (p. 99).

In essence, the requirements imposed by the national curriculum were welcome as a framework for the enhancement of the curriculum for the primary years. Some headteachers welcomed the reform because, in sharply reducing classroom autonomy, it “had the useful effect of strengthening their own position as curriculum managers” (Grace, 1995, p. 101). However, the National Curriculum emerged less from professional concerns than as a result of bureaucratic and political directives in a top-down implementation. Thus, support of the type just described soon evaporated as “hastily considered and ineffectively carried out” implementation problems (too many subjects in the 14-16 timetable, not enough teachers for technology and languages) exposed “ideological contradictions (and) operational problems” (Marsh, 1994, p. 1).

Resistance to the National Curriculum occurred because teachers felt their professionalism was being questioned and challenged. At times resistance was passive; for example, Brown (1992, cited in Ball, 1994, p. 17) noted that 7% of Maths teachers had never read any National Curriculum documents. Teacher resistance was more active in relation to the new regime of testing and assessment. Grace (1995, p. 104) noted that “here, there was a much stronger sense that inappropriate and unworkable models of assessment had been imposed upon primary education...”. In 1993, primary school teachers boycotted the reporting of Key Stage One Standard Assessment Tasks. There was also consternation at having to work 5,000 ‘statements of attainment’ into classroom teaching, marking and reporting. One headteacher observed to Grace (1995, p. 102):

*The national curriculum has presented a number of dilemmas. Whilst I feel there is an overload, I have a duty to implement it. Thus, while my sympathies are with the staff, I do my best to ensure that it is covered, even though I realise the problems faced by the staff.*

In the 1995 Eltis Review in New South Wales much the same lament was heard with some echoes still apparent in 2003. Hargreaves and Evans (1997, p. 3) concluded that the outcomes of the 1989 Education Act in the UK “pandered to high profile parents, diverted teachers’ energies to public relations and paperwork, weighed teachers down with interminable testing requirements and overloads of content, and caused a rush for early retirement”. Another study of Key Stage One assessment found “a significant number of teachers in the 32 case study schools fundamentally misunderstood the premises and methods of School Attainment Tasks and teachers assessment and have employed these misunderstandings to organise their classroom practice” (Gipps and Brown, cited in Ball, 1994, p.17).



In January 1994, the *Final Report: The National Curriculum and Its Assessment*, known as the Dearing Report, was released. The Dearing Report argued that the details and prescription of the national curriculum had impeded scope for the professional judgement of teachers. The Dearing Report recommended that the National Curriculum should be slimmed down, giving time back to teachers during the week to teach their own curriculum. Hargreaves and Evans (1997, p. 3) reported that “the investigation into and final report on National Curriculum implementation coordinated by Sir Ron Dearing eventually pulled the government back from the abyss and started to restore some respect for the teaching profession.” *The Observer*, on the 15 November 1994, reported:

*Sir Ron Dearing finally buried the Baker legislation and unveiled a national curriculum remarkably similar to that which existed before Baker began to meddle.... The whole sorry exercise has wasted in the region of £750 million, driven thousands of teachers into early retirement and brought unhappiness and disruption to home and school (cited in Hargreaves and Evans, 1997, p. 37).*

In 1994 in the UK, media commentators began to ask why the government refused to consult the body of educational research and ignored historical and theoretical studies in driving through the National Curriculum.

*The Times* reported:

*The key message Sir Ron delivered.. was that professional responsibility be handed back to teachers within a broad framework... This is common sense; it is what we train them, and pay them to do. Good teachers are driven by their imagination, their knowledge, their love of the subject (cited in Hargreaves and Evans, 1997, p. 38).*

The Education Act 1996 reduced the National Curriculum content for Primary schools from 1997, providing scope for greater flexibility by giving schools back the equivalent of one day a week to organise their curriculum to suit local needs and interests (Farrell, 2001, pp. 29-32). The term used for this process was “slimming down” the complexities and detail of the National Curriculum, and the positive reaction was that ‘Dearing had trimmed it back to reality’ (Mahoney and Hextall, 2000, see pp. 23-45).

The National Curriculum for secondary schools, fully implemented in 1996 but revised for 1999, was similarly freed up, with schools given the flexibility to allow students to spend more time on a favourite subject, take a second foreign language, focus on the arts or sport, or take A levels earlier (Farrell, 2001, pp. 29-32). Alexander (2000) argues, however, that the New Labour government (elected in May 1997) brought in additional centralised control of the curriculum through introducing the ‘literacy hour’ in 1998 and an additional ‘numeracy hour’ in 1999.

Troman (1996) had earlier identified two groups of teachers under the National Curriculum – the “old professionals” who retained practices they felt worked, and the “creative mediators” who worked with the National Curriculum in a way that suited their personal beliefs. The relaxation of the National Curriculum in the UK from 1997 has given further scope for teachers to work more constructively with their students while sustaining the value of a national and coherent curriculum policy.

The policy expectation behind the National Curriculum in the UK was that by more closely defining the curriculum, and making it common and accountable to the State, standards would rise. As it turned out, the National Curriculum was a complex and expensive exercise that consumed teachers’ work and led, through boycotts, to significant modifications. Australian schools avoided much the same fate through a different constitutional arrangement, better advice, and possibly a bit of luck. Nonetheless, some of the problems experienced in the UK have been apparent in New South Wales.

## 2.3 Research issues since 1995

Of the many topics the subject of research since 1995, three issues were central to the task set the Evaluation: teacher workload, consistency of teacher judgments in assessing and reporting, and the place of parents in policy reforms. As noted in Section 1, Background to the Evaluation, teacher workload was a major part of the *raison d'être* of the Evaluation so it is a natural starting point for this brief review of the research literature. Consistency of teacher judgment is an issue that arose during the data collection, partly as a genuine concern in schools, and partly because of the generally positive reaction to the professional support document and video trialed in schools prior to the Evaluation. Parents have always been important for any discussion relating to the assessment of the progress of their children and ways of reporting on that progress.

### Teacher workload

The major focus of the work of schools has always been teaching, however the nature of this work has changed significantly over recent times. For example, in the United States of America “teachers are asked to accomplish more in less time (and) the amount of content is much more extensive” (Clarke, 1994, p. 2). Recent research shows that, in some States of the USA, overcrowding of the curriculum became such a problem that “instructional decisions are rarely data-driven and often focus on covering curriculum, rather than meeting student learning goals” (Whittaker and Young, 2002, p. 43).

Similarly, changes to the curriculum in New Zealand seem to have affected assessment and record keeping rather than curriculum coverage or pedagogy, with teachers feeling that they do not have the resources available to properly cover all areas of the curriculum (Wylie, 1999). This has important implications for students as well as teachers. Wien and Dudley-Marling (1998), in a very worrying analogy, describe the crowded curriculum as “the train curriculum, each content topic like a separate boxcar: children either catch it or miss it, depending on the time when it is offered. If the child doesn’t get it when it is slotted into the production schedule of fixed times, too bad, because the curriculum moves on to something else” (p. 42).

While more control has been exercised over class sizes, and teachers are better qualified as professionals, teachers’ work has become more complex and demanding. A study by Wylie (1999) found teachers in New Zealand are spending more time on preparation, marking and report writing than they did in the past, which has affected the amount of time they have available to spend with individual students, parents or on other projects. Although teachers are doing more assessment work, some teachers feel that they are not necessarily getting a better picture of individual student needs, feeling instead that increased assessment wastes valuable class time.

On the other hand, some teachers see the benefit of additional assessment while still being aware of the pressure it puts on other areas of their work. Increasingly, teachers have become concerned that they will not have time to cover the whole curriculum. Although Wylie’s study involved only teachers in New Zealand, solutions identified in that project have an important message. Wylie (1999, p. 125) reported “changes that people in schools would make to improve their workloads were to reduce paperwork and administration. Teachers would also reduce assessment and class size, improve their support and have more non-teaching time”. Encouragingly, teachers thought that relief from teaching would be best spent in professional discussions with colleagues rather than simply catching up on paper work (Wylie, 1999).



Professional development and material support from systems are imperative to the success of any change in schools. Without benchmarks, some schools are able to convince themselves that what they are doing is sufficient so little is done to change their ways (Goldman and Conley, 1997). Some schools are also hesitant to change curriculum as final exams in most education systems still issue students with a mark or a rank, often the entry ticket into tertiary study. The final examination thus retains its value in the community despite, or alongside, general acceptance of formative assessment rather than just marks in primary and junior secondary stages (O'Neil, 1994). Some teachers mistakenly feel that combining formative and summative assessment is doubling their workload (Neeson, 2000).

Although support and professional development are essential to the successful implementation of change, “increases in resources, while often cited as the prerequisite to reform, may never be adequate to bring about change in schools” (Goldman and Conley, 1997, p. 23). This is because “values and beliefs are important components of motivation and performance at work” (Goldman and Conley, 1997, p. 14). If teachers do not believe in the process in which they are engaged, the best to be hoped for is compliance. Compliance might mean that teachers’ behaviour may change, but the attitude remains the same (Goldman and Conley, 1997). In an era that involves much clearer specification of what teachers are expected to achieve, though not necessarily with more resources, professional judgement is seen to be less valued as the State uses its influence to shape teachers’ professionalism towards shared policy goals (Whitty, 2002, p. 67).

Teachers in NSW schools have a record of close adherence to new syllabuses as they are presented as mandatory. The problem NSW teachers face is trying to balance class time between all the Key Learning Areas. Similarly, in a study done in the USA by Massell, Kirst and Hoppe (1997) of nine States on the progress of standards-based education, it was found that the most critical element facilitating continuation of a standards-based approach was to balance basic skills or traditional teaching methods with new approaches. In addition, “as the demands for accountability to prove that schools are delivering instruction that produces desired student outcomes increase, teachers and administrators will need to assure that the performance assessments being used in their classrooms and schools are professionally credible, publicly acceptable, and legally defensible” (Haydel et al., 1995, p. 6).

Guskey (1994) contends that it is unreasonable to ask teachers to produce assessment tasks that can encompass all of the above without adequate training and development. In New Zealand, curriculum changes have been characterised “by much tighter specification of what students are expected to learn, an extension of assessment programs and related initiatives aimed at monitoring students’ learning, and closer control by the state of teachers’ performance. In addition, professional development funding has been increasingly contracted out and tied to specific priorities, rather than being provided and managed by the central agency for all teachers on the same basis” (Philips, 2000, p. 144).

These pressures increase teacher workload and anxiety. They may also give rise to assessment techniques that are technically correct but do not necessarily produce the best quality information on students. The California Assessment Collaborative believes that teachers need comprehensive and extensive training and support in the area of assessment (Whittaker and Young, 2002). Although schools rarely have the necessary resources to make the conditions for change ideal, they are still required to change. While some do not succeed, as Brandt 1994(a) argues, those schools that “work smart”, efficiently and collaboratively, do succeed.

Goldman and Conley (1997) recognise that the successful implementation of any new educational concept relies on teachers' ability and/or willingness to translate the concept into classroom practice. Carpenter (2000, p. 387) acknowledges that a "frequent feature of the good ideas is that they place the burden of educational reform squarely on the shoulders of teachers". Although there is a general feeling amongst teachers that outcomes-based education has increased teacher workload (Guskey, 1994), some teachers and schools are coping better than others. Thus, Goldman and Conley (1997) question what they call the "critical unresolved issue: can we identify those factors or combination of factors that help to explain why some schools embrace and implement reform while others struggle unsuccessfully to change, and still others resist any change at all" (p. 4).

Goldman and Conley (1996) list the following as characteristics that influence the rate and quality of change in schools—the "inherent tendency towards compliance of each individual faculty member, strength of the bonds among faculty members (social cohesion), norms of the school as they affect communication and exchange of information (culture), strength of the enticements and sanctions of the State, the school's history with previous reforms or programs of improvement and the values of teachers and of the community in which the school is located" (p. 12). In order to effect successful change a school must have the facilities to do so and the collective attitude of the staff that the change will benefit the learning experiences of students.

What all of this suggests is the need for schools, collectively, to share their understanding of what changes are being proposed, and why, and then determine an agreed course of action which delivers results to them which they agree are worthwhile. Underpinning it all must be opportunities to develop shared understandings through well-focused professional development.

## Consistent teacher judgement

Consistent teacher judgment and assessment should be closely linked in making valid and reliable decisions about students' work, and thereby win over the trust of students and parents that outcomes assessment and reporting is fair, accurate and meaningful.

Whittaker and Young (2002, p. 43) reason that "building the capacity of teachers to design, use and interpret student performance data becomes a focal point in reform efforts in today's high stakes accountability environment". They go on to propose that "assessment development requires sophisticated knowledge of reliability, validity, and measurement, as well as expertise in the subject matter assessed (...) it is a time and resource consuming endeavour". It has been recognised in the United States of America that "teachers need multiple and sustained opportunities to examine student work together" (Whittaker and Young, 2002, p. 45). Jamentz (1994, p.56) observed that "teachers must have opportunities during the school day to collaborate on the analysis of student work and to plan appropriate instructional improvements. Schools can convey the importance of this work by providing time for it as an integral part of teachers' responsibilities".

These findings have not gone unnoticed. In the first six months of 1998 a collaborative project involving Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland funded by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, was established to develop consistency in teachers' judgements of student assessment (*Consistency Project Report*, DEETYA, 1998). Recommendations from the project concluded that consistency of teacher judgement should be a high priority for all schools and that schools need to set aside time to enable teachers to participate in professional discussions about outcomes and levels of achievement. It was recognised that this commitment from schools needed to be supported by systems with the provision of quality professional development.

Central to the success of such work is the provision and collection of moderated and annotated student work samples to enable teachers to further their understanding of the different levels of achievement.

Education systems across Australia are attempting to help teachers develop consistency in their judgements and various States have created packages for schools to address this issue. These include *Consistency of Teacher Judgement; A Training and Development CD-ROM for Teachers* (South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment, Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training and Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1998) and *Consistent Teacher Judgement in Action: A Resource for Schools* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2002).

These packages both cover the same key issues although they differ in strategies for delivery. *Consistency of Teacher Judgement; A Training and Development CD-ROM for Teachers* (1998) encompasses “an outline of consistency concepts, step by step strategy guides, audio delivery for staffroom use, interviews with teachers, principals and educational leaders, (and) video strategies in action”. This package covers the key issues more rapidly than *Consistent Teacher Judgement in Action: A Resource for Schools*, 2002, thus making it potentially easier for schools to complete the workshops and take more time for the discussion of the implementation of the concepts.

‘Consistent teacher judgment’ is an issue both within and between schools, especially where results of internal school assessments are to be incorporated into an external qualification. O’Neil (1994) observed that, although outcomes are supposed to be common to all students within a system, without consistent teacher judgment across schools some schools will be held to higher standards than will others. In order to rectify this problem, teachers need to be given the necessary support to facilitate professional discussion between schools on a regular basis. Jamentz (1994) concluded that “active participation in the process of debating, building consensus, inventing tasks and learning to interpret student work (is) important in effecting the instructional improvements associated with the new assessments” (p. 55). In NSW, where we have an abundance of many small schools, the need for schools to share such strategies is very compelling.

## The role of parents

The importance of parental involvement in education has long been recognised and has reached the point where educational authorities advocate the need for schools to devise strategies for consulting with their community on all manner of things including assessment. For example, the California Assessment Collaborative, in explaining the role of assessment, stated that “for assessment to have instructional value, the content that they assess should be aligned with the main learning goals of the curriculum; the assessment task should represent the types of skills and knowledge the students are expected to attain; teachers should be able to interpret the results and see clear connections between student work, assessment results, and their teaching decisions; *and students, their parents, and community should understand clearly what kinds and level of performance students are expected to achieve*” (Whittaker and Young, 2002, p. 44, our emphasis).

Surveys done in the United States of America reveal not only the belief that parent involvement, emphasised in outcomes-based education, will have a lasting effect on education, but also that teachers believe this involvement is important to the success of a school’s program (Clarke, 1994). However, the high level of jargon contained within standards frameworks that education systems present to their parents in a variety of ways often leads to confusion rather than enhanced understanding. Schwarz (1994) asks “how can a teacher or student make sense of such statements as ‘outcomes are high quality culminating demonstrations of significant learning in context’?” (p. 87).

If neither teachers nor students can make much sense of the jargon used by a process in which they are engaged, it is difficult to see how parents are going to have an informed understanding. Attempts to write outcomes in 'plain English' have not been automatically successful. Language is a particularly difficult factor in areas where people come from different professional, cultural and social backgrounds.

Outcomes assessment and reporting needs to be sensitive to the task of being professional, without favouring teachers' knowledge and experience so that it leaves students and families confused about what the reporting of judgements made about students' work actually means. Syllabus documents in NSW describe reporting as "the process of providing information, both formally and informally, about the process of student achievement. Reports can be presented in a spoken or written form. (...) Reporting should provide a diagnosis of areas of strength and need, including those in which the students might be given additional support. (...) Reporting information needs to be clear and appropriate to the audience" (*Mathematics K-6 Syllabus*, 2002, p. 141).

Parents are understandably conservative about educational change as much is at stake for their child, though parents are not necessarily cautious if they are brought into the discussion and different views are treated with respect. American research shows that "reforms receive the strongest criticisms when they focus on new goals to the seeming exclusion of basic skills or traditional teaching methods (Massell, Kirst and Hoppe, 1997, p. 8). This is just one of the many tensions and trade-offs that occur between schools and their communities (Crump, 1996, p. 37).

As parents play an integral part in contributing to the creation of positive and successful learning experiences for their children, the importance of parental understanding of outcomes frameworks should not be ignored. Parents must have a certain level of knowledge concerning the aims of the educational system in which their child is enrolled to understand properly their child's progress and to assist in their progression through, for example, the 6 Stages (Kindergarten to Year 12) in NSW.

Implementation in NSW has focused on preparing teachers, but support strategies for schools have not ignored the place of an informed and supportive parent community. The range and nature of support strategies are outlined below.

## 2.4 Implementation in government schools

### Board of Studies NSW

In 1996 the Board of Studies NSW released a booklet titled *Assessing and Reporting Using Stage Outcomes (Part One: Assessing)*. This booklet provided an explanation of the Board's syllabus model using Stage outcomes. It made clear that Board support documents would be forthcoming to provide further advice on the formative purposes for assessment and reporting, though schools and systems were responsible for devising their own frameworks. This began a process of defining the Board's principles of assessing and reporting. Also provided were options for planning, interpreting and recording outcomes.

In 1998, *Assessing and Reporting Using Stage Outcomes (Part Two: Reporting)* was distributed outlining how Stage outcomes could be used in the reporting process. In order to provide advice relevant to a broad spectrum of readers, this booklet set out six case studies of schools working through the process of designing a summative report. It concluded with a discussion of the needs of parents and the community. More recently, the Board has been active in providing access to syllabus support material to teachers, primarily through web-based and CD ROM formats.

In 2000, the Board released *The Primary Curriculum: An Overview*, which provides details on the Board's curriculum responsibilities, the guiding principles for Primary education, the Syllabus model used by the Board, the Six Key Learning Areas, and cross-curriculum matters such as equity, curriculum perspectives and curriculum integration.

However, as noted in one of the most recent syllabuses, “it needs to be acknowledged that students learn at different rates and in different ways (...) it is necessary to focus on the individual needs, interests and abilities of each student when planning a program that will comprise the most appropriate outcomes and content available” (*Mathematics K-6 Syllabus*, p. 5).

## NSW Department of Education and Training

In order to facilitate the introduction of outcomes assessment and reporting in NSW government schools, the NSW Department of Education and Training offered three phases of support: policy advice, generic support and subject specific support.

### Policy advice

Government school systemic directives were framed in two documents; *Principles for Assessment and Reporting in NSW Government Schools* (NSW Department of School Education, 1996) and *Memorandum to Principals—Assessment and Reporting in NSW Government Schools* (Boston, 1996) [Appendix 1]. *Principles* stated that the “central purpose of assessment is to provide information on student achievement and progress and set the direction for ongoing teaching and learning” (p. 1). Furthermore “the purpose of reporting is to support teaching and learning by providing feedback to students, parents, and teachers” (p. 1). Initially, schools were seen to be assessing to report, and many will have viewed reporting as a burden rather than as a productive process to further the learning experience of students. For many schools, implementation advice and change management strategies were crucial at this stage, though, given the varying levels of readiness, designing one set of advice for a system as large as government education in NSW (more than 2,000 schools) was extremely difficult in the mid-1990s.

According to *Principles*, “Good reporting practice takes into account the expectations of the school community and the system requirements, particularly the need for information about standards that will enable parents to know how their children are progressing” (p. 5). In addition, in writing about the importance of Portfolios as part of the reporting process, *Principles* (1996) states “a portfolio is more than an eclectic mix of student work samples. It (...) demonstrates that learning has occurred. A portfolio must have clear intent and purpose that is linked to the syllabus outcomes” (p. 6).

These guidelines for assessment and reporting were summarised in the *Memorandum to Principals: Assessment and Reporting in NSW Government Schools* (Boston, 1996) which stated, “there is scope for variation in the style and format of reporting provided that the reports clearly convey what the student knows and can do and how that compares with the standards expected by the syllabus”. Although there is no conflict between statements in these two documents, schools and teachers would need more specific guidelines for reporting to their communities if they were to manage this part of their work with confidence and relative ease.



## Generic support

Strategies for assessment and reporting in primary schools were produced by the then NSW Department of School Education to “assist schools in implementing the *Principles for Assessment and Reporting in NSW Government Schools*” (1996, p. 1). This booklet provided ideas and suggestions only and teachers were asked to use this booklet as a guide to developing their own procedures.

In describing assessment strategies to be employed by schools, the booklet states that “assessment strategies employed by the teacher in the classroom need to be directly linked to and reflect the syllabus outcomes” (p. 6). The booklet does not use the word ‘mandatory’—rather it focuses on ‘guide’ and ‘assist’. In an attempt to help teachers and schools, the booklet contains examples and/or guidelines for assessment strategies including observation, portfolios, performance assessment, self-assessment and both teacher made and other tests. Similar support was offered to secondary schools through the *Assessment and Reporting Issues 7-12*, of which there were six bulletins.

In 2002, the NSW Department of Education and Training implementation support package, *Consistent Teacher Judgement in Action: A Resource for Schools* was developed “in response to a growing need for guidelines and strategies to support an outcomes approach to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting and school planning in K-6. The central focus of the resource is to ensure teachers’ professional judgements are used in ways that provide valid, reliable and meaningful information about student achievement to students, teachers and the wider community” (p. 2). The CTJ workshops enabled schools, where time could be found, to develop consistent teacher judgement practices with a focus on English and Mathematics. Opportunities to include parents were also contained within the resource.

Ideas that are central to the resource include “outcomes are signposts of student achievement; consistency comes with collaborative planning to develop teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks or events, and moderation” (NSW Department of Education and Training, video part one). Moderation is further explained as “a process where teachers compare judgements to either confirm or adjust them. The process involves close collaboration to establish a shared understanding of what achievement of an outcome looks like and whether or not the student has demonstrated achievement of the outcome” (OHT 4.1). Other documents used within schools, especially syllabus documents, are referred to throughout this resource enabling teachers to see how the resource can be used effectively by them in their school. Through this resource, teachers are provided with systemic approval and encouraged to take this opportunity to work with their colleagues towards ensuring students receive reliable and equitable assessment.

## Subject specific support

To help teachers with the creation of quality assessments, the package *Classroom Assessment Resource; English K-6 and Mathematics K-6 Syllabus outcomes: Stage Two* (2002) was produced by the NSW Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Commission NSW, and the Association of Independent Schools NSW, but has not yet been released to government schools. This resource provides “models of effective, quality assessment tasks when teachers are developing their own assessment practices” (p. 7). The document states “focused curriculum-based assessment assists teachers to monitor students’ progress” (p. 8).

The resource provides examples of literacy and numeracy assessment tasks from each strand. Each example includes the outcomes and indicators for the three levels of outcome achievement, a teacher record sheet, links to English as a Second Language [ESL] scales and to directions for further teaching and learning. Although the example assessment tasks cover more than one outcome, tasks do not integrate other Key Learning Areas, nor is advice given on how many assessments need to be done to establish a student's level of achievement for the stated outcomes. This resource is also available for Stage 3, but not released as yet to government schools.

A similar resource has been produced for secondary schools by the Student Assessment and Reporting Unit (of the NSW Department of Education and Training Student Assessment and School Accountability Directorate). Released to schools in Term 3, 2002, *Consistency in Assessment and Reporting: A Support Package for Secondary Schools* “aims to provide secondary schools with advice and guidance about a whole-school process of ensuring consistency in the way in which teachers make judgements about student achievement. The package also provides schools with support in developing procedures for monitoring and reporting student progress and achievement” (p. 5). The package achieves this through workshop activities and examples of practice. Other resources to further develop teachers' understanding of assessment and reporting are included within the package. That teachers need sufficient time to collaborate is sufficiently recognised by this package when discussing the “characteristics of a school where consistent teacher judgements are being made” (p. 2.4). Also, “teachers discuss student work samples within or across faculties or between schools to moderate and develop consistent and comparable judgements” (p. 2.5). This package provides schools with sensible and useful advice about assessment and reporting, for example “the assessment plan should (...) be time efficient and manageable” (p. 2.13).

Two other resources that have been used productively in schools are *Starting With Assessment* (2000), which was developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Commission NSW, and the Association of Independent Schools NSW, and *Count Me in Too: Professional Development Project* (2003) developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training. *Starting With Assessment* provides teachers with examples of assessment in literacy and numeracy at Early Stage 1, and suggests teaching strategies that can be put in place as a result of the level of achievement. “Effective and manageable methods of monitoring and recording student progress” are not only recommended by this package, but also described as “integral” to the process of teaching and learning (NSW Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Commission, and the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, 2001, p. 2.6). Support materials contained within the package for both teachers and parents facilitate professional development and help all parties involved to understand the role of assessment in the classroom.

Aside from the support given to implement the *Count Me in Too* project, strategies for maintaining the program were also included. Important areas needing to be addressed after additional systemic support is no longer available are to “be aware of the school's priorities and reasonable expectations on teachers' time, commitment, and energy levels (...) organise time for teachers to plan, share ideas and discuss...pass on assessment information to next years teachers...this will minimise the amount of assessment require... (and) plan ways of providing training for new teachers” (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003, section 2, p. 11). The range of generic and subject-specific support materials provided through the Board of Studies NSW and NSW Department of Education and Training highlights the attempts to pursue faithfully the Recommendations of the 1995 Eltis Report. Good examples have been set for us to follow.

## 2.5 Concluding comment

Over the last decade there has been a continuing debate about an outcomes-based approach to education. In NSW there have been major developments and clear and decisive moves forward in terms of syllabus development and the provision of some support material. Australia has crafted its own version of outcomes-based education and, in NSW, this has been systematically documented in the work of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training.

It is fair to conclude that much has been learnt since the mid-1990s, not just in New South Wales. We now need to examine our successes and review areas of difficulty in order to enable all schools to manage their curriculum and reporting responsibilities to greater effect. The Evaluation has documented in the next Section of the Report the experiences of schools in recent years, and offers Recommendations for action in Section 5.



## 3. The evaluation process

### Introduction

The Evaluation was commissioned in November 2002 by the NSW Department of Education and Training at the request of the then Minister, the Hon. John Watkins MP, in order to provide advice to the Minister and Director-General about the extent and effectiveness of school-level implementation of outcomes assessment and reporting in government schools. It should be stated that schools were very pleased to see the Evaluation get started and the educational community as a whole was highly supportive.

There appear to be great expectations in relation to the results. Typical of comments received were the following, each made anonymously via the Evaluation's website survey:

*Thanks for the opportunity. This is important work and this method is terrific. Views from all will provide a recognisable direction that should be pretty obvious, when all is said and done.*

*I welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you. Over the past two years our school has spent countless hours designing and modifying our assessment and reporting procedures and policies.*

*I would like to share what I have with you and to learn any new strategies for assessment and reporting. This is definitely an area that we can all develop from as teachers. Good luck!*

*Thanks for the opportunity to share thoughts on a time-consuming and difficult process that has been a source of considerable frustration for some years. Good luck!*

### 3.1 The Evaluation team

The Evaluation of Outcomes, Assessment and Reporting was conducted by:

Professor Ken Eltis  
Chief Investigator

Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
University of Sydney

Assoc. Professor Stephen Crump

Faculty of Education and Social Work,  
University of Sydney

Project support was provided by:

Gavin Patterson

Senior Project Officer  
NSW Department of Education and Training

Lisa Jane Kinny

Research Officer

## 3.2 The reference group

A Reference Group was established to provide input to Professor Eltis and Associate Professor Crump during the Evaluation. The Reference Group, chaired by Dr Phil Lambert, Assistant Director-General (Schools / Primary Education), included representatives from the NSW Teachers Federation, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, the Office of the Board of Studies NSW, the NSW Primary Principals' Association, Public Schools Principals Forum, the NSW Secondary Principals' Council and a member of the Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training.

The Reference Group, that met late in 2002, had its first meeting with Professor Eltis on 5 February 2003. At this meeting the terms of reference were reviewed and there was agreement on how to inform schools of the purpose of the study and the methodology to be used by the Evaluation. The Reference Group met on a further two occasions during the course of the Evaluation to assist with selection of schools for site visits, comment on web survey questions, and advise on areas identified for discussion in the final report.

## 3.3 Data gathering

The Evaluation gathered information and evidence from a wide variety of sources. It was seen as vital to hear from teachers, principals, parents and students in government schools directly involved in outcomes assessment and reporting, as well as from educational authorities, professional associations and the broader educational community.

Major evidence came from:

- copies of syllabuses and support documents provided by the Board of Studies NSW and NSW Department of Education and Training;
- copies of materials used for professional development;
- electronic systems for outcomes tracking and reporting;
- a detailed literature search;
- a web-based search of international educational authorities;
- a web-based survey of teachers, principals and parents;
- visits to schools;
- discussions with educational authorities in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland;
- discussions with the Australian Council for Educational Research;
- written submissions; and
- invited oral submissions from peak interest groups.

## 3.4 Aspects of the Evaluation

### Memoranda

In February 2003, Dr Alan Laughlin, Deputy Director-General (Schools), wrote to all Principals and Superintendents advising them of the establishment of the Evaluation of outcomes assessment and reporting in NSW government schools [Appendix 2].

Professor Eltis also wrote to schools in late February about the Evaluation, stating his intention to draw on a number of sources of information including: visits to a range of schools throughout NSW, a review of approaches in other States and overseas, and written responses from schools, organisations and individuals [Appendix 3]. He wrote:

*We believe it is essential that we hear the views of teachers in schools so that we learn at first hand of their experiences of reporting using outcomes assessment since the Report "Focusing on Learning" (1995). We plan to speak to the following groups: Principals and school executives, classroom teachers, students and school community members.*

A further memorandum from Dr Alan Laughlin, sent in March 2003, encouraged schools to participate in the Evaluation and included an update from Ken Eltis [Appendix 4].

### Submissions

The Evaluation received over 450 submissions (including web-based) from a wide range of individuals and groups including principals, teachers, schools, parents, professional bodies, various peak education groups, Board of Studies NSW, and the NSW Department of Education and Training. A list of written submissions to the Evaluation is provided in Appendix 5.

The Evaluation also received from schools examples of school-based policies on assessment and reporting, assessment tasks, tracking systems, student portfolios and school reports, in response to the following request by Ken Eltis when he wrote to schools:

*We are also keen to see school-developed materials, including work programs, assessment and reporting documentation which schools may have devised reflecting new approaches. If schools wish to provide copies of materials, we should be very pleased to receive them, and may use them to build up a set of best practice models.*

Oral submissions were taken during May 2003 from executive members of the following peak education groups:

- NSW Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group
- NSW Teachers Federation
- NSW Primary Principals' Association Inc
- Professional Teachers' Council NSW
- Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW
- NSW Federation of School Community Organisations (FOSCO)

- Public Schools Principals Forum
- NSW Secondary Principals' Council
- Early Childhood Education Council of NSW Inc
- Australian Association of Special Education (NSW Chapter)

## Web-based survey

In March 2003, an on-line survey was placed on the Website of the NSW Department of Education and Training [see Appendix 6] with an invitation for teachers, principals and parents to respond to a range of questions (see below) on outcomes assessment and reporting. Professor Eltis wrote:

*The Evaluation Team has considered areas where it would appreciate advice and input from all schools including those involved in the site visits. These areas are set out in a series of questions that can be answered using an on-line survey by accessing the Public Review and Inquiries section of the DET homepage, [www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au) that has been established for the duration of the Evaluation.*

The web-based method of gathering data, developed by the Evaluation with expert assistance from the NSW Department of Education and Training, was innovative and proved to be successful by attracting responses from 160 principals, 145 teachers and 49 parents across New South Wales from a wide range of backgrounds, levels of experience and age groups. The survey categories for teaching and non-teaching school based and system staff included school type, district, State office directorate or unit, position, gender and experience. The survey categories for parents/caregivers included school type, district, gender, and year range the child is in. All respondents were offered the opportunity to provide their contact details for possible follow-up by the Evaluation. A detailed profile of those who responded to the web survey is included in Appendix 7.

The web-based survey was widely advertised in schools and on the homepages of the various professional and interest groups listed above [see Appendix 8 for an example]. The ability to respond in this way replaced to some extent the need for groups and individuals to provide lengthy written submissions. This technology allowed the Evaluation to ask some direct and pertinent questions that could be answered anonymously, quickly and more readily than traditional modes for submissions.

The questions (prepared with advice from the Reference Group) posed in the survey were as follows:

### For teachers

1. How have you or your school managed outcomes assessment, recording and reporting in the various key learning areas?
2. What has assisted you to make 'professional judgements' about student achievement of outcomes? What issues have you had to overcome? Please describe.
3. Outline successful strategies you have undertaken to manage the implementation of:
  - assessment using outcomes,
  - reporting using outcomes.
4. What in your view is needed to improve school-based assessment and reporting practices using outcomes?
5. In what areas would you welcome further advice, models or direction for outcomes assessment and reporting?

### For principals

1. How has your school managed outcomes assessment, recording and reporting in the various key learning areas?
2. What has assisted your teachers to make 'professional judgements' about student achievement of outcomes? What issues have they had to overcome? Please describe.
3. Outline successful strategies your school has undertaken to manage the implementation of:
  - assessment using outcomes,
  - reporting using outcomes.
4. What in your view is needed to improve school-based assessment and reporting practices using outcomes?
5. In what areas would you welcome further advice, models or direction for outcomes assessment and reporting?

### For parents

1. What do you find useful in the way your school assesses and reports your child's progress?
2. What involvement do you think parents should have in school-based assessment and reporting?
3. What are the best ways for your school to report on student progress?
4. General comments.

The responses, many of which are quoted in Section 4, suggest that the using a web-based survey allows a new degree of frankness in comments and observations for a review of this nature.

## Sample of government schools

The Evaluation visited 24 government schools in rural, regional and metropolitan areas across New South Wales ranging from P1 to P6 Primary schools, High schools and a Central school (see Table 1 below). The sample of government schools visited on this occasion was larger than the number visited when the 1995 Report was being prepared.

<i>Types of schools</i>	<i>Number</i>
<i>P1 Primary</i>	2
<i>P2 Primary</i>	6
<i>P3 Primary</i>	2
<i>P4 Primary</i>	2
<i>P5 Primary</i>	3
<i>P6 Primary</i>	1
<i>High School</i>	7
<i>Central</i>	1
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>24</b>

<i>Area</i>	<i>Number</i>
<i>Metropolitan</i>	13
<i>Regional</i>	2
<i>Rural</i>	9
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>24</b>

Table 1: Evaluation School Visit Profiles (type, area and number)

Professor Eltis wrote to schools:

*I have now commenced visiting a selected number schools across NSW as well as collecting information from the website survey and various educational authorities. The Evaluation Team is anxious to hear any views schools and the community have on the nature and content of syllabus and support materials forwarded to them by the Department of Education and the Board of Studies NSW, and on the implementation processes followed, since the introduction of assessment and reporting using outcomes in 1995 and later.*

On school visits the Evaluation met with principals, teachers, parents and students. The school visits were a vital part of the Evaluation and thanks are offered to the school communities visited for their kind assistance, co-operation and thoughtfulness in communicating their views on assessment and reporting as well as for providing team members with school-based assessment and reporting materials. Schools were provided with a series of questions before each school visit (see below). The consideration given to the questions by principals, teachers and parents was very much appreciated. Students also participated enthusiastically.

## Preparation for school visits

After contact by the Evaluation Team, and agreement given to participate, schools were contacted with a proposed schedule for the visits. In a letter from Professor Eltis, schools were advised about the Terms of Reference for the Evaluation, given a list of the Evaluation Team members, and sent the following guide to discussion topics for the visit, with an invitation to use the list to generate discussion prior to the visit, to help structure a submission if appropriate, and to help organise relevant groups of teachers, students and parents to meet with the Team. Schools were also encouraged to collect examples of programming, assessment tasks and class work that might be of interest to the Evaluation.

### Broad Areas for Discussion On School Visits

The questions below should provide a stimulus for discussion. Schools should feel welcome to raise any matters they consider relevant to the terms of reference for the Evaluation.

1. Understanding
  - 1.1 Why do you think we are using outcomes for assessment?
  - 1.2 Do you think teachers and parents have a shared understanding of why we are reporting using outcomes?
  - 1.3 What has your school done to promote understanding of reporting intentions
    - with teachers
    - with the community?
2. Syllabuses and Support Materials Developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Board of Studies NSW.
  - 2.1 Do current syllabuses promote what you consider to be “best practice” teaching and learning in the classroom? Which syllabuses and how? Where are the problems?
  - 2.2 What syllabus and support documents have you used to develop your assessment programs? How have they been helped?
  - 2.3 How can reporting using outcomes be made more manageable?

*continued...*

### 3. Reporting

- 3.1 Have guidelines presented in syllabuses incorporated outcomes assisted or hindered assessment and reporting practices? Can you specify those that have been helpful and those not so?
- 3.2 How have you or the school been using outcomes for reporting processes? Is there an agreed set of procedures in the school? How have teachers been helped to implement these procedures?
- 3.3 What responses have there been from parents to changes in reporting practices? What do they value? Where do they see difficulties?

### 4. Impact of changes on practices

- 4.1 How have work practices changed with the introduction of reporting with a focus on outcomes?
- 4.2 What is your view on changes in the balance between teaching/learning against assessment/reporting?
- 4.3 Are there areas where you would have benefited from additional support? Where and in what ways?
- 4.4 What is being done to manage workload issues with the changes? What additional measures would you suggest?

### 5. Other issues

What additional comments would you have to improve assessment and reporting practices in schools?

## Consultation

The Evaluation consulted educational authorities and agencies in Victoria and Queensland on issues relating to outcomes, assessment and reporting. The main contacts were:

### Queensland

Professor Roger Slee	Deputy Director General Curriculum, Learning and Strategy Education Queensland
Dr. Gabriella Matters	Director, Assessment and New Basic Branch Education Queensland
Professor Bob Lingard	Chair, Queensland Studies Authority
Mr Peter Luxton	Director, Queensland Studies Authority
Dr Graham Maxwell	Deputy Director, Student Performance Queensland Studies Authority
Ms Donna George	Deputy Director, Syllabus Services Queensland Studies Authority

## Victoria

Professor Geoff Masters	Chief Executive Officer Australian Council for Educational Research
Ms Margaret Foster	Research Director, Assessment and Reporting Australian Council for Educational Research
Ms Susan Dennett	Manager Performance Measurement Education Victoria
Mr Bruce Wilson	Chief Executive Officer Curriculum Corporation

Following an approach from the Catholic Education Commission, the Evaluation met with representatives for a discussion of issues relevant to the Terms of Reference.

## 3.5 Concluding comment

We believe it is fair to conclude that, while a very small team managed the Evaluation, it consulted very widely and thoroughly. The quality of submissions and the readiness of participants to give forthright advice meant that a rich body of data emerged for analysis and consideration. The richness of that data is reflected in the Section which follows.



## 4. Findings of the Evaluation

### I PROGRESS, BUT...

#### Introduction

As described in Section 3, the Evaluation received advice and comment from a wide range of sources. Major themes emerging from all forms of input are discussed below, along with an assessment of the impact on schools of various materials provided.

To begin this section of the Report, several critical matters are raised as a backdrop to the description of the various issues and concerns which have come to the fore.

#### 4.1 A timely review

Student learning should be at the heart of what happens every day in school. The main focus of a teacher's professional work involves planning, teaching, assessing, reporting and working with colleagues and parents to enhance student learning. In the past decade, pressures associated with implementing revised syllabuses and assessment requirements have been added to by those associated with structural reform or the need to meet added mandatory responsibilities such as those arising from Child Protection Legislation.

Respondents to this Evaluation described how the attention they give to learning and teaching increasingly has been diverted to other school matters. School leaders reported on how they spend more and more of their time on matters relating to administration, management and welfare, leading them to feel that the curriculum does not receive as much attention as they believe it deserves. On top of this, teachers told us they have come to feel "assessment-driven", and this preoccupation comes at the expense of other aspects of curriculum planning and implementation. For many, their creativity has been diminished and they have experienced loss of valuable time to create exciting learning experiences for students of varying abilities. Parents said they felt overwhelmed by the changes they see, and cite as an example the language and size of school reports, often finding it hard to work out just what it is their child has been learning at school.

Of course, there may be some exaggeration in these claims. Nevertheless, the frequency with which such views were expressed suggests that there continues to be a problem with the crowded school day.

The 1995 Report *Focusing on Learning* attempted to return curriculum to centre stage in the school day. The previous decade had seen a "crowding of the curriculum" in NSW schools that teachers found distracting and parents found unnecessary. At the national level, work on curriculum had been productive in drawing attention to the lack of consistency and efficiency in delivering schooling across Australia, but many saw what resulted from the national initiatives as going too far in prescribing a complicated mixture of subject statements and a profile framework for reporting on student outcomes. A major reason for the 1995 Review was to overcome the difficulties created by excessive demands emanating from curriculum and assessment reforms at the time.

By 1996, government schools in NSW voiced a need for clearer direction about the work they were doing in relation to curriculum assessment and reporting. The publication *Principles for Assessment and Reporting in NSW Government Schools* (1996), was a key document in the Department's advice to schools about how to respond to the relevant recommendations of *Focusing on Learning*. The then Director-General, Dr Ken Boston, wrote to principals (6/8/96) outlining the expectations of the Department that principals should consult with their parent community, and lead their schools towards practices that would reflect the principles outlined in his Memorandum (see Appendix 1).

Boston recognised that “schools are at many different points in the development of their reporting practices” and that “there is scope for variation in the style and format of reporting, providing that reports clearly convey what the student knows and can do and how that compares with the standard expected by the syllabus”. In terms of reporting, Boston reaffirmed the expectation that schools should report to their parents twice a year, but made it clear that these events “*may* be linked to portfolio reporting and a range of other excellent reporting practices involving interaction between teachers, students and parents” [our emphasis].

With hindsight this was well judged advice. The Memorandum gave scope for schools to move forward based on their level of engagement to date with outcomes assessment and reporting, and to relate the needs of their community to the level of their experience as a staff, in order to construct a workable process for meeting the Department's objectives. Unfortunately, the Memorandum was silent on the level of professional support to be offered and this has proved to be a major issue over the last seven or eight years.

Evidence from the present Evaluation suggests that teachers would have been greatly helped if the Memorandum had been followed up with more specific guidelines and with regular updates reflecting progress in thinking as schools gained more experience. Teachers have been conscientiously generating a wide range of diverse and variable programs, teaching procedures, assessment tasks and report forms all towards the same goal. While there has been a sharing of ideas and approaches across some schools, more schools appear to have operated largely in a climate of “hearsay and contradictory advice” which has led to confusion. Perhaps the most worrying outcome has been the apprehension that “I do not want to see my school being accused of failing my students” which has led to what some have described as “assessment and reporting overkill”.

Little will be gained from the present Evaluation if we simply catalogue problems and concerns. More importantly, we need to identify where schools and teachers have been successful in their curriculum and reporting approaches and where the system as a whole can derive benefit from that success.

This Evaluation has been a timely one. The most recent review *Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in New South Wales* (Vinson et al., 2002), did not have curriculum as its major focus, though Chapter 2 did address critical issues relating to curriculum and pedagogy. The Report of the Inquiry commented:

*It is disturbing that, despite the Board's attempts to address the recommendations of the Eltis Review, and to alleviate these (curriculum concerns), little seems to have changed. (p. 93)*

The conclusion from the present Evaluation is that the picture may not be quite as dismal as the Report of the Vinson Inquiry suggests, though there are indeed critical problems which are addressed in this Report. In general, this Evaluation complements rather than refutes the conclusions Vinson reached in the Report of the inquiry he chaired. School assessment has changed dramatically since 1995, and this Evaluation collected a wealth of data about those changes and the impact they have had on workload, professional judgement, assessing and reporting which are presented in this Section.

The recommendations emerging from the present Evaluation are designed to provide guidance on how best to overcome present difficulties and build on the positive experiences of those schools implementing exemplary approaches. Before we can move to these recommendations, it is necessary to highlight areas where success has been achieved and difficulties are being experienced with the intention of framing the best advice possible for sensible reform.

## 4.2 The workload issue: The need for clarity

Increase in teachers' workload was put forward as a major reason for conducting the Evaluation and is taken as the starting point for describing the concerns that emerged. One comment typical of those made to the Evaluation is the following from a teaching principal, sent as part of a response to the web survey:

*Teacher workload, including paperwork, preparation and selection of assessment tasks, re-writing of report formats, has increased enormously since 1995. Not only are we still coming to terms with all of the new syllabus and associated documents, there are too many other added pressures on teachers that are expected to be included in an already overfull teaching load.*

Schools and teachers are the ones ultimately responsible for designing and delivering a challenging and exciting school program and for assessing the success of the learners with whom they work. To assist them in their work they receive curriculum support in the form of Syllabuses and related materials from the Board of Studies NSW. Curriculum delivery is also supported with documents developed and distributed by the NSW Department of Education and Training and, less and less it would seem, through professional development opportunities. To help teachers with their assessment responsibilities, advice is available from these two sources, but more so from the Department.

The inescapable conclusion from this Evaluation is that there is not a shared understanding of what teachers are required to do. It is especially the case that if we could give a clear delineation of what is mandatory for teachers to do by way of curriculum, assessment and reports, we would be doing schools a great service.

Why is this so necessary? In the case of primary teachers, they struggle with six well-written, extremely comprehensive syllabus documents, all containing detailed sets of outcomes. The Board of Studies NSW website lists 329 'Outcomes for all K-6 Learning Areas'. The significance of this total is very apparent when we realise that an outcomes approach expects teachers to know and understand all 329 outcomes, for all six Key Learning Areas. Teachers are expected to meet the varying needs and levels of abilities of every one of their students. In school visits and submissions we were constantly told that it is impossible to cover all of the outcomes expected for each Key Learning Area. The same problem exists for the junior secondary curriculum (Years 7-10, Stages 4 and 5). While new syllabuses are internally consistent and quality documents, reflecting the fact that they have been prepared by enthusiastic experts, taken as a group they are seen as unmanageable in the time available. Many teachers provided calculations to indicate there is simply not enough time in the week, and commented:

*There has been a massive increase in workload. I have little time to even talk to colleagues. [Primary school teacher]*

*What do I need? Time, time and more time! [Secondary school teacher]*

This leads teachers to feel subjected to overwhelming pressure:

*We feel under pressure to say, "Yes, they have actually achieved the outcome". [Primary school teacher]*

*Outcomes assessment is what we're doing all day. [Primary school teacher]*

*We seem to be assessing more than we are teaching. [Primary school teacher]*

*I have to get this done because I have to assess you on it. [Primary school teacher]*

The Evaluation sought to find out why the view that "everything is mandatory" has prevailed. In the Report *Focusing on Learning*, Recommendation 9 clearly directed work in Outcomes and Assessment to "a limited number of outcome statements" (p. 10). The subsequent Memorandum of the Director-General (6/8/1996) supported this view for government schools, as did the advice in the document *Principles for Assessment and Reporting in NSW Government Schools* (1996). Further advice was given in 1997 in a document, still current, entitled *Strategies for Assessment and Reporting: Primary Schools*, which was sent to every school. A similar document was sent to secondary schools in 1998.

A review of documentation issued to schools by the Board of Studies NSW has not revealed any specific advice concerning the mandatory pursuit of the whole range of outcomes. In the case of syllabuses, each of the K-6 syllabuses contains a statement defining outcomes and their use in the syllabus as a guide to curriculum planning but no reference is made to the possible mandatory nature of all outcomes. For example, the following statement is given in the *English K-6 Syllabus* (1998, p. 15):

*Syllabus outcomes are specific statements of the results intended by the syllabus. These outcomes are achieved as students engage with the content of the syllabus. They are arranged in Stages. The outcomes are statements of the knowledge, skills and understandings expected to be gained by most students as a result of effective teaching and learning of English K-6 by the end of a Stage.*

The new *Mathematics K-6 Syllabus* (2002, p. 18) repeats and extends this statement as follows:

*...by the end of Year 6, it is expected that most students are able to demonstrate achievement of Stage 3 outcomes to some level. Learning however occurs at different rates and in different ways. Therefore, there will be variability in the achievement of Stage outcomes during particular Years of schooling. For example, in Year 6 there are some students who have learning needs that will determine that they should be working towards outcomes at an earlier Stage or at a later Stage.*

Complementary to this, the Board of Studies NSW document *Assessing and Reporting Using Outcomes Part 1: Assessing* (1996) advises that outcomes "will be a guide" when teachers are planning and implementing the assessment of student achievement (p. 8). Further, in this statement teachers are advised to continue to plan for individual differences and use the provisions of flexible progression to allow students to work at a pace appropriate to their understandings. Stage outcomes were designed to be "signposts of progress rather than hurdles that students must clear before continuing to the next Stage" (p. 11).

This sensible advice is reflected in the following summary given in the new *Mathematics K-6 Syllabus* on the significance of Stage Statements which are included in each syllabus:

*Stage Statements describe what students typically know and can do as consequence of having undertaken the syllabus content presented for the Stage.*

Finally, in a further comment in the Board's *Assessing and Reporting Using Outcomes, Part 1: Assessing* it is stated that teaching and learning in this new environment are not intended to “focus on individual outcomes or that outcomes need to be assessed singly” (p. 12). The document concludes with the summary statement that teaching and assessment strategies should allow students to demonstrate outcomes in integrated ways.

It should also be noted that in the Board of Studies NSW *K-10 Curriculum Framework* (2002), which is seen as providing parameters for development of all new syllabuses, reference is made to “broad learning outcomes” to allow for flexible syllabus implementation and reduce unnecessary overlap of the curriculum at the school-level.

What remains is a picture where teachers feel “they have to do it all” despite highly specific advice telling them to be flexible, exercise sound judgement and make choices when developing and offering learning programs that best meet their students’ educational needs.

The Evaluation’s survey of teachers and principals asked for areas where they would welcome advice about outcomes assessment and reporting. A common response was related to the Department’s and the Board’s expectations about what teachers would do with syllabuses when organising their teaching. One primary teaching principal wrote that what is needed are:

*Realistic expectations for completion of all outcomes in all KLAs. It is simply impossible to cover all of them and it imposes too much stress upon staff and students to try to achieve them all, yet they are all mandatory (sic).*

Another primary teacher called for:

*A decision that removes the mandatory use of outcome statements for assessing and reporting.*

Yet, as noted above, the Evaluation found no specific advice concerning the mandatory pursuit of the whole range of outcomes. The confusion can be removed through agreement on what should be the mandatory components of all syllabuses. As will be argued later, it should be possible to restrict the total amount of the mandatory components within and across Key Learning Areas to return to teachers the opportunity to be less restricted and maximally creative in their teaching. Parents, too, will benefit from such a move as they will have a clearer understanding of what is perceived to be “essential learnings” as reflected in school reports when they come home.

## 4.3 The Key Learning Areas

This Evaluation has demonstrated very clearly that schools, in their pragmatic way, *are* making judgements as to what should be given primacy in the curriculum as they determine how to balance their offerings across the week and year in each Stage. It is usually a deliberate decision in primary schools to focus on literacy and numeracy each school day and then build in time for some exposure to the remaining four Key Learning Areas. In this context teachers and parents often expressed concerns about the difficulties teachers now have in providing “a well-rounded, holistic program” for their children.

The question arises: should the Key Learning Areas be abandoned or reduced? The Evaluation did not find any case for abandoning the concept and principle of organising the curriculum around Key Learning Areas. The problem is the number of Key Learning Areas and how to integrate what is presented in each. Other States and systems are exploring new ways of managing the structure and demands of their curriculum.

Caution needs to be exercised when we look at steps being taken in other systems—direct transfer of practices across systems is difficult—but it is nonetheless essential that note be taken of what is happening elsewhere and the reasons for promoting and introducing change. Lessons can be learnt. Recent initiatives of interest to the Evaluation are considered below.

In Queensland, a decision has been taken by Education Queensland to examine, on a trial basis, the effects of reducing the number of Key Learning Areas to four “New Basics”. The intention is to see how Education Queensland might be able to address some of the negatives of outcomes-based assessment and reporting on the work load of teachers. In piloting “New Basics”, the view has been taken that outcomes by themselves do not necessarily promote the development of critical thinking – an emphasis on promoting sound pedagogical practices is also needed. Education Queensland has responded to the criticism that too strong a focus on outcomes can inadvertently promote an approach to programming that is fragmented into one-off tasks and skill assessment rather than focusing on imaginative teaching and the promoting of students’ acceptance of responsibility for their own learning. This was a response frequently heard during the 1995 Eltis Review.

Education Queensland has decided to explore “New Basics” that include curriculum organisers, productive pedagogies and rich tasks. Fifty-nine schools in Queensland are presently involved in a four-year trial of the New Basics Project. “The New Basics are futures-oriented categories for organising curriculum. Essentially they are a way of managing the enormous increase in information arising from globalisation and the rapid rate of change in the economic, social and cultural dimensions of our schools” (Education Queensland, <http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics>). “New Basics” has four curriculum organisers defined as follows:

- Life Pathways and Social Futures
- Multiliteracies and Communications Media
- Active Citizenship
- Environments and Technologies.

It is the intention that the New Basics will be learned as students complete a series of intellectually demanding, practically-oriented projects known as ‘Rich Tasks’:

*Far from ignoring the ‘Old Basics’ of reading, writing and arithmetic, the Rich Tasks incorporate them in challenging and meaningful ways that include an added focus on the communication, cooperation and problem solving skills necessary to achieve the ‘New Basics’.*

What is of particular interest is the way an attempt is being made to re-structure work demands in a more integrated fashion, thereby providing teachers with a consolidated source of curriculum and assessment materials rather than a very broad array of documents, each containing detailed demands. In addition, these curriculum materials are themselves being linked to a program of Productive Pedagogies which provide teachers with a framework within which they can choose and develop strategies from the twenty Productive Pedagogies in relation to:

- what they are teaching
- the variable styles, approaches and backgrounds of their students.



This is an ambitious program—when is curriculum change not ambitious? An extensive trial is being implemented before possible adoption State-wide. The trial is particularly interesting for the lessons it will deliver in relation to how it helps teachers cope with the crowded curriculum and how the community responds to the assessment and reporting processes to be introduced. It is noted that any State-wide implementation will require extensive discussion with the Queensland Studies Authority.

Similarly, in Western Australia, the Curriculum Council has developed a curriculum framework from K-12, including a set of thirteen “Overarching Learning Outcomes” that students are expected to achieve throughout their K-12 years of study (*Curriculum Framework*, 1998, p 18ff). These outcomes are:

- Students use language to understand, develop and communicate ideas and information and interact with others.
- Students select, integrate and apply numerical and spatial concepts and techniques.
- Students recognise when and what information is needed, locate and obtain from a range of sources and evaluate, use and share it with others.
- Students select, use and adapt technologies.
- Students describe and reason about patterns, structures and relationships in order to understand, interpret, justify and make predictions.
- Students visualise consequences, think laterally, recognise opportunity and potential and are prepared to test options.
- Students understand and appreciate the physical, biological and technological world and have the knowledge and skills to make decisions in relation to it.
- Students understand their cultural, geographic and historical contexts and have the knowledge, skills and values necessary for active participation in life in Australia.
- Students interact with people and cultures other than their own and are equipped to contribute to the global community.
- Students participate in creative activity of their own and understand and engage with the artistic, cultural and intellectual work of others.
- Students value and implement practices that promote personal growth and well-being.
- Students are self-motivated and confident in their approach to learning and are able to work individually and collaboratively.
- Students recognise that everyone has the right to feel valued and be safe, and in this regard, understand their rights and obligations and behave responsibly.

Schools are reminded to forge a link between these overarching statements and individual learning area requirements so that students experience integration across the curriculum (see Western Australian Department of Education and Training ‘policy and guidelines’ <http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/outcomes/policy/pg41.htm>). They have been reported in detail to show their comprehensive nature.



In New Zealand, the curriculum is organised around a set of principles that inform ‘essential learning areas’, ‘essential skills’, attitudes and values and national curriculum statements. The school curriculum is meant to take into account local needs, priorities and resources through consultation with the school’s community. The New Zealand Curriculum Framework describes the elements fundamental to teaching and learning in New Zealand schools around seven essential learning areas which describe in broad terms the knowledge and understanding which all students need to acquire, linked to essential skills and values:

- Language and Languages
- Mathematics
- Science
- Technology
- Social Sciences
- The Arts
- Health and Physical Well-being.

All seven learning areas are connected, are not intended to be isolated from each other and are considered to be essential for a broad and balanced education. National Curriculum Statements in New Zealand spell out required learning outcomes, strands, objectives and levels ([http://www.tki.org.nz/r/governance/nzcf/ess\\_learning\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/governance/nzcf/ess_learning_e.php)).

Of interest to the Evaluation were the New Zealand Assessment Resource Banks and the New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars Project. The Assessment Resource Banks are an on-line collection of materials for mathematics, science and English that help teachers to assess student achievement. Each contains a task, a scoring guide and an explanation of its relevance to each national curriculum statement as listed for teachers to use ([http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/two/tools\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/two/tools_e.php)). Curriculum exemplars of student work highlight features of learning that teachers are likely to observe and are able to collect as evidence of development, as well as providing a basis for future programming (<http://www.tki.org.nz/e/assessment>). The fundamental principle behind these documents is the belief that assessment is to be used to support students’ learning and the quality of learning programs. Assessment provides the basis for meaningful and concise reporting.

Unease about the current levels of prescription in documents made available to teachers to assist them devise learning programs which cater for a huge range of students is not confined to New South Wales. Taking over another State’s (or country’s) system is not necessarily the best response. Were this to happen, it would involve a huge re-write of syllabus documents – a major downside on its own. Worse, it would ask teachers to reject the sound basis for their current work and start again. On the other hand, we should sustain keen interest in what other systems are doing to see how they address critical problems all systems face. Our analysis has certainly pointed to the need for a broader view of what students do at school, given what will face them when they leave. What is seen as desirable is a joint approach across Australia to analyse how the curriculum might be re-aligned. As has already been pointed out, there are presently moves in this direction and it would be wise to support them.

## 4.4 Syllabuses and assessment: The need for coordination

At the present time the intention is that all syllabuses should follow the same model, with a statement of aims and objectives. Six Stages have been defined:

<i>Early Stage 1</i>	<i>Kindergarten</i>	
<i>Stage 1</i>	<i>Years 1, 2</i>	<i>Primary</i>
<i>Stage 2</i>	<i>Years 3, 4</i>	
<i>Stage 3</i>	<i>Years 5, 6</i>	
<i>Stage 4</i>	<i>Years 7, 8</i>	<i>Secondary</i>
<i>Stage 5</i>	<i>Years 9, 10</i>	
<i>Stage 6</i>	<i>Years 11, 12</i>	<i>Senior Secondary</i>

Table 2. Syllabus Stages in New South Wales

Linked to each Stage is a series of Stage Statements which define what students should be expected to achieve in the relevant years. As described earlier, for each Stage a detailed set of outcomes is presented. “Each (K-6) outcome is then accompanied by a set of indicators. An indicator is a statement of the behaviour that students might display as they work towards the achievement of syllabus outcomes” (*English K-6 Syllabus*, 1998, p. 15). Detailed content specification is also provided. To assist teachers, support documents, various annotated work samples, units of work, and modules may be provided by the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Board of Studies NSW, along with information able to be used with parents and employers.

With all of this detail available to assist teachers, it would seem a fair question to ask: why is there so much concern about what is to be taught and how the impact of teaching on learning is to be assessed? One problem has already been referred to—the volume of the demand. But there are others.

The Evaluation became aware of concerns expressed by schools that there was not enough coordination in the writing and delivery of syllabuses. It is fair to say that the Board of Studies NSW has worked hard to involve teachers and schools in the developmental work leading to the issuing of a syllabus. Consultation occurs with the professional community and there is limited trialing of documents in some schools. Unfortunately, those who had been involved in commenting on syllabuses in draft format were very critical that the time for comment was usually short and the documents appeared to be ‘nearly final anyway’.

There remains a fundamental problem in consultation. If only teachers could be asked to comment on a syllabus in terms of the suitability of workload demands and achievable outcomes, it could be confidently expected a better result would be achieved. Moreover, if schools and primary teachers were asked to comment on *the demands across syllabuses*, a much more realistic assessment could be made of an achievable workload across all Key Learning Areas. A positive outcome would be that certain Key Learning Areas (especially Personal Development, Health and Physical Education, and Creative Arts) would not be neglected to the extent they appear to be now.

It is important to make comment on the perception that there is lack of productive communication between the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training. This affects schools in a variety of ways. First, syllabuses are produced by the Board and issued to them before adequate arrangements are in place to support their implementation. The Evaluation became aware of poor communication between relevant officers responsible for curriculum matters in each organisation. Then there is the matter of assessment. Both the Board and the Department are preparing advice. Even during the present Evaluation a *Descriptions of Levels of Achievement: Consultative Model* appeared in schools proposing a system whereby the number of levels of achievement to be specified for each Stage would not be consistent.

The problem for those conducting the Evaluation is that, in the proposed model, an elaborate system of multiple levels of achievement is being put forward and, if agreed to, will be forwarded to schools for implementation. The merits of the scheme are not immediately apparent to the teachers we interviewed in this Evaluation—one teacher provided a detailed rebuttal of the model as his contribution to the Evaluation; much discussion will be needed to determine the viability of such a large change across the system. From comments made in schools during visits, it is obvious that the Board of Studies NSW needs to gain extensive feedback before advancing too far. It needs to be said that this latest development has been much commented on during school visits and in submissions and in correspondence received subsequent to the 2003 Annual Conference of the NSW Teachers Federation. Typical of the comments was that of a Principal of a primary school in Western Sydney who wrote:

*I am extremely concerned about the suggestion that performance levels are possibly going to be introduced in addition to the Stages we already have. For primary schools used to reporting along a continuum, this would add a further layer of complexity.*

A much more positive and achievable result would be obtained if those responsible for supporting curriculum development worked as closely as possible with those responsible for implementation, were aware of current practice and had far more immediate and direct contact with schools. Not to integrate such work results in a poor use of resources and in a frustrated profession feeling it is the victim of actions on the part of key people in curriculum organisations who, while well-meaning, are seen as being unable to communicate with one another. The Principal of a South Coast school wrote:

*The whole process of ongoing assessment and reporting using an outcomes-based model could have been much better managed across the State had there been much clearer direction provided by NSW Department of Education and Training and Board of Studies NSW. These groups should have been providing school communities with a rationale, best practice statements, research findings and examples in order to support the individual efforts of schools within their wider communities AND avoid the necessity for each school to invent the wheel especially when (as I suspect) we will all end up in about the same place anyway.*

A more coordinated approach should result not just in more focused syllabuses, hopefully specifying mandatory components, but in the development of specific implementation guidelines timed to coincide with the issue of a syllabus. The emphasis should be on linking the release of new syllabus documents with appropriate support materials and necessary professional development programs in which teachers are given consistent information.

A major component of implementation support programs should be a focus on appropriate assessment and reporting strategies. It became clear during the Evaluation that schools had worked very hard to implement Recommendation 13 in the 1995 Report *Focusing on Learning*, but the latter part of that recommendation, stated below, has not been pursued as thoroughly as is necessary to achieve a better result for schools and their communities:

*... support (should) be given to schools during 1996 through the provision of thoroughly considered guidelines and options, which assist in the development of reporting procedures, and give indications of what constitutes valid, reliable, informative and manageable reporting to parents.*

Failure to align curriculum, assessment and reporting processes will result in further teacher frustration and feelings that major tasks have been handed over to them with inadequate support and guidance. Failure to bring together those responsible for the development and implementation of curriculum documents with the closer alignment of assessment guidelines, will be a further inhibitor to the development of improved practices in government schools. Schools should have available to them clear advice sufficient to allow them to refine their own teaching, assessment and reporting procedures and have confidence in their ability to present to their communities the outcomes of their efforts in the form of first-class reports on student achievement.

## 4.5 A changed climate

As noted earlier in this Report, there are a number of areas where there has been significant change in schools since 1995. Teachers have been asked to respond to a broad range of initiatives in that period, and have worked in a thoroughly professional way to achieve productive results. What follows are some areas identified by the Evaluation where there is a changed climate in schools and school communities.

### State-wide testing

This Evaluation has demonstrated that, when the Report *Focusing on Learning* was being written, a major shift in attitude to State-wide testing was under way whose influence in schools was not totally apparent at the time, but which is now very obvious. The data gathered in this Evaluation demonstrated that overt support for 'testing programs' has changed dramatically. So, too, has the quality of information available to schools as a result of State-wide testing programs.

The 1995 decision by the then NSW Department of School Education to take over the Basic Skills Testing Program has had a positive impact on schools. The testing program in Years 3 and 5 results in a comprehensive set of data (in print and on disk) being made available to each school and to parents, enabling schools to see how their students perform in relation to their past cohorts and in relation to others across the State. In addition, there is the Computer Skills Assessment in Year 6. Primary Writing Assessments for Years 3 and 5 are now conducted and have proven to be a new source of data to schools, as well as a new avenue for professional development for primary teachers in the same way that marking the Higher School Certificate (HSC) provides insights for secondary school teachers.

Similarly, secondary schools now have State-wide testing programs in Years 7 and 8 in the form of the English Language and Learning Assessment (ELLA) and Secondary Numeracy Assessment Program (SNAP) tests. As a further source of information about the academic performance of their students, secondary schools have the School Certificate (expanded to include Science and History/Geography and Civics combined) and the (revised) Higher School Certificate.

Very little hostility was expressed during the Evaluation towards this expanded level of State-wide testing. State-wide tests have come to be valued by teachers and parents for their perceived diagnostic assistance for each student, as well as for their help in enabling teachers to locate the performance of the school's students relative to other students across the State. One primary teacher said that the Basic Skills Test is:

*... a barometer about all the things you are doing. Some of the support material has been very worthwhile.*

In 2003, schools were given the opportunity to register to participate in Data On-line (served by the NSW DET intranet homepage) via an assigned login and password. Data can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Data On-line allows schools to analyse their results by viewing achievement levels, student results and questions, and question details. Results and graphs can be printed and results can be exported to the school's hard disk. The site provides hyperlinks to resource materials.

Parents, too, have found Basic Skills Testing results very informative. At the very least, the results provide a sound basis for parents to have good discussions with teachers on their child's progress. At a parent interview we were told that Basic Skills Tests:

*... are brilliant, simply from the point of view that they are a whole State thing.*

Another primary parent wrote via the web survey:

*I'm not advocating a return to standardised testing and ranking in the grade, but something like the Basic Skills Test bands give a clearer indication of whether the child is struggling or coping (than the outcomes-based report).*

Given that a new climate exists, one in which schools (and authorities, of course) have available to them enhanced information arising from State-wide testing programs, are there further implications for curriculum assessment and reporting demands placed on teachers and schools?

The Evaluation heard concerns that the Department, through its superintendents, was overly interested in using State-wide testing results mainly as a way of urging schools to improve performance in subsequent years by imposing target percentage levels to be achieved in given bands. Many teachers and schools have said that the school-level diagnostic and programming value of the very comprehensive data being made available was not appreciated in discussions on target-setting, especially as resource levels to assist schools to achieve "agreed" new targets were not addressed to the satisfaction of the schools.

The Evaluation came to the very strong view that decisions in relation to State-wide testing have been correct. Schools have available to them benchmark data at crucial times:

Year 3:	Mid-way through Stage 2
Year 5:	Mid-way through Stage 3
Year 7:	At the beginning of Stage 4

This alignment sees valuable data going to schools at critical times and transition points for students. The Year 5 Basic Skills Tests, for example, take place at a time that allows schools to do all they can to assist students before the transition to secondary school. And results of the tests in Year 7, if used well with data forwarded by primary schools at the end of Year 6, should assist schools to identify how they can support all students they have in their charge.

To capitalise on what has been achieved by way of quality data provision, resulting in changed attitudes to testing, it will be essential that decisions to determine mandatory outcomes in syllabuses result in appropriate emphases in Basic Skills Tests. Given that such an alignment is made, there will also be implications for the way schools manage their assessment and reporting responsibilities across the various years of each Stage. In those years when such State-wide data are available for communication to parents, it should be possible for schools to choose to use these results as the focus of their reports and place some limits on what they themselves produce for reporting purposes. The particular emphasis on those years when such State-wide data are available should be on diagnosis and on what the results mean for future learning.

In short, there are further advantages to be derived from this changed climate if we do not succumb to the temptation of over-emphasis on the significance of one-off State-wide testing programs. Changes as suggested could result in the removal of some of the “assessment overkill” vividly described by so many teachers.

## ICT, Teaching and Learning, and Assessment

In the 1995 Report *Focusing on Learning*, reference was made to the work being done on computer software packages to assist teachers with assessment and reporting. Note was made of the disquiet felt by parents at reporting that relied heavily on computer-derived statements. The Report did acknowledge the potential of computer technology in assisting teachers in the analysis and diagnosis of students’ learning needs and achievements. Potential benefits were also seen in the use of computers and multimedia technologies in the sharing of information about curriculum.

Both the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training are to be commended for their efforts to use computer-based software to assist schools. The materials relating to syllabuses on the Board of Studies NSW website are exemplary and, unlike in the past, it can no longer be argued that schools and teachers do not have direct access to the documents they are expected to follow in devising their curriculum. Far from it. Reference has been made already to the quality of the materials sent to schools on CD ROM by the NSW Department of Education and Training in relation to State-wide testing programs. The Evaluation is, however, far less complimentary about the material on assessment available on the website to teachers.

We are on the verge of what should be a major leap forward, if we get things right. In the next stages of development we can expect to see interactive opportunities provided for teachers—and parents, too—especially through the establishment of interactive chat rooms in relation to work samples supplied by schools. Careful planning is needed to ensure maximum opportunities for schools to take advantage of what technology will now be able to deliver to them.

Reference has been made elsewhere in this report to the New Zealand Assessment Resource Banks and the New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars Project. Also of interest are the steps taken in the UK forming part of the National Curriculum In Action (<http://www.ncaction.org.uk>). A website has been created which uses students’ work to show what the National Curriculum looks like in practice, provides pupils’ work and pupils’ accounts of classroom activities, special ICT features, and related materials for each subject area, and links to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website that provides examples of schools reports for Key Stages 1,2 and 3 (<http://www.qca.org.uk>).



The National Curriculum site, designed primarily for teachers and senior managers working in schools, is a good guide to what might be possible in NSW. The examples given show:

- the standards of students' work at different ages and Key Stages
- how the programs of study translate into real activities
- effective use of ICT in subject teaching
- how teachers recognize and promote students' creative thinking and behaviour.

All of the above indicates the potential for a truly great leap forward. We should be able to capitalise on the good work accomplished in recent years in relation to curriculum definition and implementation and on what has been done with ICT. Now, with a body of students and teachers in schools who have benefited from greater access to computers and what they can offer—many have grown up with them as part of their daily lives—we can look forward to being able to do even more to support the development of the critical capacities of the next generation of young Australians.

## Consistent teacher judgement

Much work has been done since the introduction of outcomes assessment and reporting to provide a basis for teachers to assess their students as accurately as possible against a standards framework. In 2001, the Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate within the NSW Department of Education and Training built up a resource for schools to develop consistency in teachers' judgements of student achievements of syllabus outcomes for English K-6 and Mathematics K-6. The result was a resource folder to lead schools through a series of workshops that required over twenty hours of school-based inservice.

Where schools have been able to find time and funds to support the Consistent Teacher Judgement program, they have found it helpful, as typified by the following comment by a country teacher that this program has linked well with other initiatives:

*Many strategies have been used from the support documents released by the DET. We've also looked at reports from other schools, talked to other small schools, who have been involved in CTJ, and attended the few inservice courses available.*

A significant result of the work on consistent teacher judgement in NSW schools is that it helped develop a shared understanding amongst teachers of Stages and Stage outcomes. Working towards consistent teacher judgment has helped show teachers how to cooperate better in developing assessment tasks and on a range of other curriculum activities. Where time for developing consistency has been provided, these schools generally have reached a mature understanding of how to teach, assess and report using outcomes. The Evaluation could not judge to what extent this was widespread across the State.

What the experience with the Consistent Teacher Judgement project has demonstrated is that, in the new climate of assessment, reporting and accountability, when time can be found, teachers can work together productively and gain new confidence about what they are doing in relation to curriculum and assessment. More opportunities of this kind are needed to avoid the problem (raised in the Evaluation) where parents receive conflicting advice from one year to the next about the assessed achievement level obtained by their children.



## Starting with assessment

Another area where a marked change is evident relates to assessment practices in Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten) and Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2). Released to government schools by the Curriculum Support Directorate of the NSW Department of Education and Training, *Starting with Assessment* is a joint product of work funded by the Commonwealth and carried out by the NSW Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Commission NSW, and the Association of Independent Schools NSW. The support materials aim to help teachers implement Foundation and Early Stage 1 outcomes with a focus on literacy and numeracy. The program acknowledges that many children now arrive at school with a number of skills well developed as a result of time spent in childcare and pre-school environments.

Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten) is now regarded as a crucial time for teachers to make informed judgements about the literacy and numeracy outcomes being achieved by each child, especially for identifying students who need increased support to achieve the outcomes before moving on. Where *Starting With Assessment* works well, teachers are careful to wait until their students display a level of confidence and familiarity with tasks before assessing them at this early age. In responding to question 1 of the Evaluation's web survey (see 3.4) it was common for teachers to refer to *Starting with Assessment*, alongside a range of collaborative activities that helped them implement outcomes assessment and reporting. *Starting with Assessment* tells the teacher whether their students are able to achieve an outcome with guidance, with minimal help, or independently. This also is exactly what parents want to know.

Parents are keen to know as soon as possible in Kindergarten whether their child is doing well or not. *Starting with Assessment* not only gives teachers the evidence to inform their own judgements, but also to inform parents about their child's needs and abilities. While time-consuming and requiring significant release support in all but ideal circumstances, *Starting with Assessment* has proved that schools value clear and detailed information about how to make the program work for the early years. As well, *Starting with Assessment* has helped schools to establish a climate within their community in which assessment and reporting by outcomes is seen as helpful to all.

It will have been noted that the phrase "time-consuming" has turned up with regularity. It has to be said that getting teachers (any professionals, for that matter) to change established practices and adopt new (not necessarily radical) practices demands commitment and time to get it right. It would seem that all too often, just as good progress is being made with a well-accepted program, recurrent funding is lost and it becomes difficult for schools to maintain the momentum. If we expect teachers to work with one another to the benefit of their students by creating enhanced learning opportunities, we need to think carefully about two things: the nature of the tasks we are asking teachers to accept, and how to provide time and support on an on-going basis to enable them to achieve a positive outcome for themselves and their students.

## II. WHAT WE WERE TOLD

### Introduction

The significant issues to emerge from the various forms of data-gathering are set out below in four major areas:

- Syllabuses, Pedagogy and Outcomes
- Assessment and Outcomes
- Reporting, Recording and Tracking
- Support and Professional Development.

What can be said with confidence is that over the last decade or so a lot has been learnt; we now have considerable insight into how helpful outcomes can be as a basis for classroom teaching, assessment and reporting to parents. From the account which follows lessons can be drawn to inform future practice, and these lessons have been incorporated in the Recommendations in the final Section of this Report.

### 4.6 Syllabuses, pedagogy and outcomes

#### Overview

Throughout the Evaluation respondents very quickly moved into a discussion of outcomes more as they relate to assessment and reporting. There was little debate about the merits of outcomes as a basis for sound classroom practice and as an underpinning of successful pedagogy. It was generally acknowledged that the Board of Studies NSW, through its committees and approval processes, had developed syllabuses incorporating outcomes which were very helpful to teachers. The issue is not so much ‘why outcomes’ but ‘why so many across all the Key Learning Areas’.

#### 4.6.1 The Views of Schools and Teachers

We have come a long way since 1995 with the release of K-6 syllabuses. All areas of the curriculum now have specific syllabus documents with outcomes available to them. The response at school level has been interesting. A country primary school teacher wrote:

*Moving to outcomes-based teaching has changed the way we teach. The challenge now is to convince teachers that these outcomes (and Stages) are floors, not ceilings.*

A parent / teacher from a regional coastal township wrote:

*Outcomes for me provide a scaffold that allows me to address my individual student needs and interests while still ensuring that I am covering content. I find them very easy to teach to and enjoy having such a framework to work in. I like the way more recent documents show the continuum through to secondary school so that we can see where our outcomes fit in the big picture. It also helped greatly watching my own child work through the HSC as I could see how Stage 3 outcomes were often the early steps in these outcomes.*

In the case of secondary schools, the compelling task for the Board of Studies NSW has been the revision of the Higher School Certificate, with the introduction of new Syllabuses and related examinations. This has been a major accomplishment, but has not prevented the development and issuing of new syllabuses for English 7-10 and Mathematics 7-10 in 2002 for implementation in 2004. Many secondary Syllabuses have been out of date and schools have needed new documents to guide their thinking and planning. The Board of Studies NSW is aware of the problem and will release all other 7-10 syllabuses in 2003, for implementation in 2005. Recent announcements by the Minister for Education and Training indicate that further steps to remedy the situation are being taken (see, for example, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4/7/2003, p. 1).

The following comments made by classroom teachers were typical of the positive feedback to the Evaluation:

*The English syllabus is a fabulous document. [Primary teacher]*

*New Math syllabus outcomes are simple—mainly descriptive—so you know what to do. [Primary teacher]*

*English / HSIE support documents are wonderful. [Primary teacher]*

*The new HSC History syllabus was very relevant and helpful. [Secondary teacher]*

While the response to the syllabuses and various support documents, including those produced by the NSW Department of Education and Training, is positive, there remain difficulties. Comments made to the Evaluation were consistent with those which arose from data collected by the Board of Studies NSW in its Primary Curriculum Project (Appendix 9, and see *Board Bulletin* 12(1) March 2003). The Board's Project was undertaken to evaluate five broad areas of NSW Syllabuses:

- use of syllabuses and support documents
- outcomes and indicators
- specific Key Learning Areas
- assessment and reporting
- other issues.

Consistent comment focused on the following matters:

- what is mandatory in syllabuses in a situation where there are too many outcomes to manage;
- there is a problem with integration across Key Learning Areas, and it is possible to develop outcomes that encompass learning from several Key Learning Areas;
- with all the attention being given to outcomes, too little attention is given to what constitutes quality teaching and successful pedagogy;
- there is not enough time to be able to fully teach the six primary syllabuses as they stand; and
- the language of outcomes is too complex and, in particular, cannot be conveyed easily to parents when reports are prepared.

In short, while the syllabus documents may be appreciated in terms of content, presentation and advice, it seems fair to conclude that, when it comes to implementation, the burden has been too great. There simply is not enough time and insufficient guidance is provided concerning how to manage the demands the various syllabuses present as a whole. This is a major problem.

*I think we need to take stock. Too much has been thrown at teachers. New syllabuses have come with no time or plan to implement them. Schools are still grappling with English now Maths, Count Me in Too and all the others. Most teachers are only really paying lip service to these syllabuses and who can blame them. Let's get one under our belt before we move on the next. [Primary teacher]*

The highly prescriptive nature of syllabuses places a huge demand on assessment responsibilities. As one primary teacher put it: “We teach kids to assess them, rather than teach kids to learn.” The problem goes beyond the demands created by overly-detailed prescription. In its submission, the NSW Teachers Federation reported that its members felt that the detailed use of outcomes involved in assessment and reporting could lead to “teaching to a script”. The current emphasis in syllabus documents is leading, in the views of many, to poor pedagogical practices in schools.

Schools would like to see more examples of work to guide their planning and, in the case of primary teachers, more examples of integrated units of work. The following comments carry important messages for syllabus writers:

*You need time to build up teaching learning processes into an outcomes assessment reporting structure. The new syllabuses should help IF there's support in work samples etc, as expected from the Board. [Secondary teacher]*

*We need time to consolidate the child's learning, rather than rush on to the next outcome. [Secondary principal].*

*A serious problem exists in that the outcomes are not friendly to the “user in the street”. We waste a lot of time explaining. The outcome language is teacher oriented and it is also too hard for children to be involved as compared to Stages 5 or 6 where the syllabus is part of the course material. [Primary assistant principal].*

Some schools had clearly excelled at producing high quality, enriching materials for their students. Often, but not always, this was in (usually bigger) schools where it was possible for teachers to share the load and prepare materials across Learning Areas. Regrettably, the quality of some tasks set for students to assess progress in achieving outcomes was poor. We saw this as resulting in large measure from the workload involved in programming and preparing assessment tasks, often reducing them to one-off, one-skill efforts rather than being more open-ended and challenging.

#### 4.6.2 The views of professional associations and other peak interest groups

The professional and peak interest groups highlighted a failure in syllabus implementation processes. Whereas peak interest groups were confident that schools now had enhanced content in syllabuses, and that most schools had brought in a reasonably workable form of reporting on outcomes, they were less confident that schools had reached the point where they had been able to enhance pedagogy.

Comments from professional organisations and peak interest groups about syllabuses, pedagogy and outcomes focused on the following major issues:

- integrated teaching is not happening (FOSCO)
- a focus on the child as learner appears to have been lost, some children just spend their time ‘chasing the outcome’ and there is a need for generic outcomes (Public Schools Principals Forum)
- there should be a reduction in outcomes without an increase in indicators so that there is time to consolidate a child’s learning (Early Childhood Council)
- there is a need to reconfirm the value of a teacher’s professional judgment (NSW Primary Principals’ Association)
- the take-up rate (on outcomes reporting) was variable across forty districts and parts of 7-10 syllabuses were obsolete (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)
- the evidence gathered for reporting purposes is problematic (Federation of Parent and Citizens’ Associations of NSW)
- there is a need for closer linking of the responsibilities of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training in relation to syllabus development and implementation (NSW Teachers Federation).

The Early Childhood Council supported the oft-repeated view that there is a disparity between the work of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training commenting “the two never seem to get together until it is too late.”

Just as important an issue, according to the NSW Teachers Federation, is the urgent need to address the mistaken belief that all outcomes are mandatory. The Teachers Federation also argued that the Key Learning Areas had the potential to be too narrow, because the weight of so many outcomes meant teachers are leaving out areas in order to “get through” literacy and numeracy as the unofficial core of the school’s curriculum, and the areas most commonly tested State-wide. The Federation expressed concern at the workload arising from assessment on a broad range of outcomes, especially in K-2. The Federation also saw a potential breakdown of the traditional willingness of teachers to collaborate across schools as a result of an emphasis of having schools more actively market themselves.

As could be reasonably expected, parents made fewer comments on the subject of syllabuses than they did on assessment and reporting, so parent comments follow in 4.7.4 and throughout 4.8.

## 4.7 Assessment and outcomes

### Overview

It was very apparent throughout the Evaluation that the whole business of assessing student performance is now a much more demanding task. Teachers are being asked to adopt a system that measures the progress of students in greater detail than before. They are being asked to make judgments about each student’s level of achievement. And they are being asked to be more publicly accountable for decisions about assessment as they appear on a child’s report.

In short, professional responsibilities in a climate of increased accountability are now defined in such a way as to make the task of teaching much more demanding. That teachers are being asked to implement much more precisely defined syllabuses with less freedom (as they see it) to be creative and innovative, is particularly annoying to an ageing profession. Older teachers are not necessarily reluctant to adopt outcomes as a basis for programming and assessment purposes just because, as some argue, they are resistant to change (though some undoubtedly are). It is more the case that the argument has not been sufficiently well made to convince them their students will be better learners and the parents will receive better information as a result of changed reporting processes.

In secondary schools there is a further sense of unease. Teachers have followed a model for assessment and reporting as part of the Higher School Certificate processes for nearly twenty years. The procedures are well tried, operating in such a way that the interests of both students and schools are well protected. (It should be recalled that it took some time for schools to accommodate assessment as part of the HSC when the change was first introduced, as demonstrated in the study at the time (Eltis, 1987) coordinated by the present Chief Investigator.) What some secondary schools are now attempting to do is extend the Years 11 and 12 approach to assessment gradually throughout the school; that is, to Stages 4 and 5. Already managing the assessment program across multiple years is proving very difficult for schools to manage.

The challenges are not simple and for many teachers it seems their sense of professionalism is being challenged. They see themselves being compromised by the extrinsic demands bearing down upon them and the intrinsic motivations they have for becoming teachers – that is wanting to work with, stimulate and excite young learners leading them into new fields and opportunities for discovery. It was not surprising to run across teachers – more so in secondary schools – frustrated by the tensions assessment demands were creating for them. The frustration is all the greater when teachers feel that the assessment approaches they are being asked to adopt are not necessarily what parents want (discussed in 4.8.3 below).

### 4.7.1 What teachers said

A 2003 survey conducted by the NSW Primary Principals' Association made available to the Evaluation found that, in a sample of all school classifications across all geographical areas, 98% were using outcomes for assessing student achievement. This present Evaluation found that assessment using outcomes, as defined in Stages, is supported in the main by teachers in the NSW Government system, the teachers' union, and the majority of professional and community organisations that were consulted or made submissions.

But what does this mean for learning? Teachers appreciate the significance of assessment to their own work and to learners themselves. As one teacher put it:

*Assessment is a critical part of learning. Feedback to kids will provide better teaching and learning.*  
(Primary teacher)

Used well by the teacher, outcomes can assist the learner to recognise skills they possess and how well they apply them. The motivation of learners may also be raised as they are invited to think about how they can contribute to what is being learned. Unfortunately, many respondents did not see these positive goals being achieved through assessment practices. Some even argued that assessment is still the “forgotten element” of teaching, something “done to students rather than for them”. However, a secondary teacher observed how things are changing:

*One of the great positives of this agenda is that it gives assessment the place it deserves.*

The introduction of outcomes as a basis for assessment and reporting has required schools to consider the purpose of assessment as being not only to identify explicitly what students know (or can do), but also what they do not know (or cannot do) and what they need to know and, most importantly, need to do to improve. The main expectation has been for schools to make a shift from graded competitive assessment to more individualised assessment based on specific outcomes expected in subject and skill areas identified in the revised syllabus documents and following the Department's *Principles for Assessment*.

In the Report *Focusing on Learning*, Recommendation 13 suggested that, in relation to assessment and reporting practices, the following issues were to be taken into account:

- the need for assessment and reporting practices to be time-efficient, and not detract from teaching and learning;
- acknowledging differences in terms of the development of individual children;
- the general well-being of the student;
- standards of comparison to enable parents to know how their children are progressing; and,
- diagnoses of areas of strength and need, including those where students might be given additional support.

For some teachers, this new approach has been an invigorating challenge:

*I love change, it stimulates me as a teacher. (Primary teacher)*

Another primary teacher welcomed the changes, but with a qualification about using the same assessment tools for reporting:

*Outcomes are the best thing for me, for my teaching, as I can see where my children are going, but it is too hard to report on all that to parents.*

A secondary teacher similarly remarked:

*Outcomes have allowed us to be more flexible in our teaching. Though it is a huge job to design the assessment tasks, teaching is easier once they are done.*

Another secondary teacher explained a little enigmatically:

*You assess what you need to know.*

General advantages noted for outcomes-based assessment were described as occurring in what teachers actually do with outcomes, especially as a way of validating their work and informing the learning cycle. While there were concerns that outcomes could dominate teaching rather than drive it, outcomes were seen as valuable for articulating explicitly the aims and objectives of all aspects of class work. This could assist develop what some research is calling 'assessment for learning' (Assessment for Learning, 2001).



When things are going well, students appear to be working more independently at school because of the changed emphasis on outcomes-based assessment. Primary students proudly led Evaluation team members through their portfolios and workbooks, explaining what they understood, how they went about their assessment tasks, and how they explained the task to their parents and family friends. Year 11 and 12 students told the Evaluation that outcomes-based assessment allows them to see specific areas where they are doing well or that need work. These students found the listing of outcomes and the assessment rubrics helped them to know exactly what they had to do, what they were going to be assessed on and when. Both teachers and students felt that this resulted in a better product. Secondary students emphasised the importance of outcome-based assessment as a way of helping them to plan their own work schedules, thereby encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning.

Assessment, used effectively, can help drive the teaching and learning. Schools have come to value formative assessment strategies and to formalise these in many ways, recognising that daily informal assessment has been part of a teacher's professional judgement for a long time. Schools in NSW see formative assessment practices as a way of gaining improvements in student achievement. Research has shown that this is a sensible way to operate. In an extensive review of research on assessment it was found that,

*Standards are raised only by changes which are put into effect by teachers and pupils in classrooms. There is a body of firm evidence that formative assessment is an essential feature of classroom work and that development of it can raise standards.* (Black and Wiliam, 1998)

Summative assessment is equally familiar to schools, though the shape and nature of this have changed as well. Summative reporting retains a high status in schools (especially secondary schools) and school communities, but some recent developments bridge the gap between formative and summative practices. Of these, portfolios in primary schools are the best example.

Whether teachers are working in primary or secondary schools, a major issue for them is to have knowledge across the Stages so that they can understand what their students have been doing earlier and where they are heading. It is particularly the case that primary teachers in general do not feel confident about what awaits their children when they move beyond Stage 3 into secondary school. Much work has gone on in an attempt to bridge the gap. The Evaluation heard of excellent liaison as teachers moved in both directions in an attempt to better understand what happens in each sector but much remains to be done in this particular area.

#### 4.7.2 What principals said

Principals were keen to participate in the Evaluation and had a lot to say. Particularly pleasing was the number of principals who responded via the Evaluation's web survey (see Appendix 7). This survey provided an avenue for a number of frank and well-considered responses regarding assessment and reporting. A primary principal was positive that:

*Outcomes-based assessment and reporting makes a lot of sense. It focuses on individuals and it encourages a stronger link between planning, teaching, assessing, reporting and back to planning. However, it has changed the profile of a teacher's day.*

A principal in a large coastal city observed:

*The current expectations on teachers regarding assessment and reporting are quite unreasonable. It is forcing teachers to focus more on testing than on teaching and learning. We don't want to turn into the systems overseas where everyone appears to be teaching to tests instead of fostering a love of learning in children.*

Another principal working in the Western Suburbs of Sydney wrote:

*Assessment of student progress is an ongoing and important task for every teacher, but the growing requirement that every outcome has to be recorded on a continual basis is detrimental and will lead to many teachers being disillusioned with their jobs. Clear assessment processes must be embedded in every school, but there must be some sanity brought to bear on the amount of clerical work required of teachers.*

A principal from a large town on the North Coast wrote:

*Assessment and reporting on student outcomes when used to enhance teaching, learning and parent support for their child's education is an asset. Used to excess for accountabilities not seemingly genuine within the teaching-learning cycle, leads to more assessing and reporting than teaching.*

Finally, a principal in a large town in the Central West commented:

*There is an assumption that outcomes-based assessment data has to be transferred directly to the reporting process. These are two different processes, though related. The (assessment) information needs to be transferred to parents and students, but the format and language of the information to be reported have to suit the recipient.*

The Evaluation would make the comment that this last remark seems to be particularly significant, and it is a view not always well understood in schools.

Principals in NSW Government schools have taken on board a high degree of ownership for the changes required as part of an outcomes approach to assessment and reporting. Principals have focused the work of their schools towards the Department's goals, and the intent of new Board of Studies NSW syllabuses. Frustrations have emerged but, overall, it can be said that schools are 'giving it their best shot'. What now needs to happen is a response which addresses the worries that have emerged from their experiences.

### 4.7.3 What professional associations and peak interest groups said

The professional associations and peak interest groups were not as concerned about assessment as about workload and reporting issues. The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW said they felt parents were happy with 'outcomes' especially when put in a language that is user-friendly and when they emphasise what a child can do. There was a view that *Starting with Assessment* was very useful but that it had been unevenly applied. The NSW Federation of School Community Organisations argued that *Starting with Assessment* should be mandatory, with appropriate support. The Public Schools Principals Forum argued that assessment is being driven by tasks, and that these tasks dictate how teachers use their time, and this is restricting the creativity of teachers and of their students.

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council argued that, so far, the assessment end of syllabus reforms had been unaddressed, except in recent communications that were “just tossing off phrases like ‘assessing for/of’”. This group strongly supported a recommendation that would lead to a “government education system reference document” which would define best practice in designing good assessment tasks.

The NSW Teachers Federation proposed that assessment processes are coming to dominate teaching and learning, rather than teaching driving assessment. The Federation also asserted that teaching and learning are not at the centre of interest in State-wide assessment. Overall, assessment is seen to be a bit like “the meat in the sandwich”—it is possibly the most inviting part of an outcomes approach, but it is squashed between the demands of programming and reporting.

#### 4.7.4 What parents said

Parents appreciate the opportunities that can come from linking outcomes and assessment. It is possible to provide information about student achievement in a variety of formats, available all-year round. But they appreciate, too, the demands placed on teachers. At present, many parents see reports as too wordy and/or too vague. A primary parent told us on a visit:

*I know what my children are doing, but I don't know how well they are doing.*

Another primary parent wrote to the Evaluation website:

*(Outcomes-based reports) are easy to read but I am not sure that they actually say anything.*

There is also a concern that assessment tasks show only that a child can or cannot achieve an outcome. A concern raised with the Evaluation was that outcomes-based assessments rarely show what a child can do beyond the task, whether it is less or more. In other words, while outcomes may be seen in the eyes of those embracing a standards framework approach to curriculum and assessment as a logical way of measuring student achievement, in the minds of some parents at least, outcomes seem to be limiting judgements about, and not necessarily a fair measure of, their child's achievements.

It should be said that, throughout the school visits, parents consistently expressed admiration for the way teachers cope with the assessment and reporting demands placed on them. One primary parent wrote:

*I am in awe of the work and skills being taught to young children these days. I question the pressure that must come to bear on teachers and students to cover and digest this vast amount of content.*

#### 4.7.5 Assessment and equity issues

A system of outcomes assessment and reporting must meet the needs of all government school students and have the potential to address issues of background disadvantage, race, gender and disability. Areas we identified where these could be an issue follow. It should be noted that no gender-specific matters were raised with the Evaluation.

## Students with special needs

A major concern in schools visited by the Evaluation, when teachers talked about the negative consequences of teaching using outcomes, was the effect on students with learning difficulties. Support teachers for students with learning difficulties argued that they had difficulty in working with Stage outcomes as few of the outcomes were realistic or applicable. Teachers were left to rewrite the outcomes and use other resources. The Australian Association of Special Education (NSW Chapter) reported syllabus documents had improved over the last five years, and that in general they were more inclusive, though “the Board could do better (...) there are certainly groups of students in NSW who cannot access them”. Some parents felt schools could do better too:

*I have had to advocate on our child's behalf. I feel that policies and procedures in regard to special education are not followed. I feel very frustrated when reading Tony Vinson's Report that special ed relies on the understanding of the school's principal.*

The Australian Association of Special Education (NSW Chapter) also questioned the extent of testing under the aegis of the NSW Department of Education and Training that goes on in K-6, and whether the results are put to good effect. While the AASE supported the use of diagnostic tools, their members reported some schools were testing students more than a dozen times a year and questioned whether all this testing was meaningful for the child and would help improve their learning.

## Students from non-English speaking backgrounds

The aims of the NSW Government's multi-cultural policies are achievable through the use of outcomes assessment and reporting. There is no inherent bias in an outcomes approach that would disadvantage students who are recent arrivals, who have a non-English speaking background, or who are speakers of English as a second language. The Evaluation did encounter concerns expressed by parents at some sites visited about the way outcomes are expressed in syllabus documents as being too difficult. Of more direct concern for teaching NESB students, is that the pressure to get through so many assessment tasks leaves little time for feedback and review. Lack of time for teachers to explain and assist with assessment task errors may create further difficulties for students already struggling to follow and complete all the work involved.

## Indigenous students

Twenty per cent of schools the Evaluation visited had a significant population of indigenous students. Two schools reported strong and effective links with their indigenous communities, and on both occasions indigenous adults attended parent interview sessions. In most cases, the issues raised had more to do with concerns not directly related to syllabus outcomes. For example, one secondary school pointed out that the task-orientation of outcomes assessment and reporting seemed to run counter to the desire of indigenous students to work together. Where outcomes-based reporting was raised, the concern was that reports tended to list what indigenous students cannot do, rather than what they can. However, the role of accessible and constructive school reports for indigenous families was mentioned as a central factor in keeping students at school and motivated to continue through primary and secondary education.

For secondary schools, Aboriginal Studies in Years 11 and 12 was reported to be a valued and valuable course for students to undertake, whether of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background or not. However, additional curriculum initiatives were seen as essential if secondary schooling is to be relevant and purposeful for indigenous students. In the oral presentation made by the NSW Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group, it was suggested that parents of Aboriginal students liked to support their children, but find the language of the reports and syllabus too difficult. Many schools have done valuable work in one-to-one strategies to help take the mystery out of reports, and the NSW AECG reported that work by Board of Studies NSW liaison officers to assist had been constructive.

The AECG valued Basic Skills Tests and was happy that changes had been made to make them more relevant to Aboriginal students, though literacy levels and Basic Skills Test performance were not improving as rapidly as one might want. The AECG argued that assessment does not just measure skills or knowledge, but measures a plethora of background factors such as health and socio-economic status that teachers need to be aware of when finalising their reporting on ability and aptitude for Aboriginal students.

## 4.8 Recording, reporting and tracking

### Overview

In the Report *Focusing on Learning* the comment was put forcefully that there was a need for more consultation with the community by individual schools as they determine what reporting processes they would adopt, reasons for the directions taken, and how to enhance community understanding of the school's intentions and procedures in reporting on individual students.

It will be apparent from comments that follow that much has been done. The Evaluation was very impressed by the efforts schools have made to agree on reporting formats, the language and style of reports, and how information can best be conveyed to parents, particularly through interviews. The Evaluation formed a very favourable impression of the professional way this communication process has been accomplished.

Equally impressive are the attempts which have been made to keep better track of student progress. As electronic storage and data transfer opportunities increase schools are anxious to do more in this area, but they realise that they run yet again into time and expertise barriers. If we are to make significant gains in relation to recording and tracking using electronic means it will be necessary to establish support teams able to work intensively and draw on acknowledged expertise already available in schools.

Our aim should be to arrive at a system where schools report on a limited number of key syllabus outcomes, retain accurate but manageable records, report regularly as a school using a variety of methods, track student progress to assist educational development, and manage this process as a community involving parents and families. This may be easier in a larger school because the load can be shared, though the Evaluation visited small schools that were doing an excellent job in all these areas.

### 4.8.1 Classroom teachers and school reporting

The Evaluation found that reporting is a responsibility schools take very seriously. A central concern encountered related to the purpose of reporting, and to what extent it needed to reflect the full spectrum of assessment strategies undertaken by teachers, given the varying expectations of students, parents and the broader community.

It is time for Recommendation 13 of *Focusing on Learning* to be fully addressed in a way that better assists schools. This Recommendation called for “the provision of thoroughly considered guidelines and options, which assist in the development of reporting procedures, and give indications of what constitutes valid, reliable, informative and manageable reporting to parents” (p. v). Many schools are doing great things to make this happen. Their effectiveness can be seen in the way the curriculum is integrated, based on outcomes, in the time given to teachers to develop quality programs, and in the time given to reflect on the evidence provided by assessment about the standard each child has reached.

Schools have a clear understanding of the place of reporting as a means of communicating the results of their work with students to students, to parents and to the Department. However, teachers have come to feel uncertainty in the area. Traditionally, they assessed in many different ways and when the time came for reporting they would make an on-balance judgment in order to get to a mark or rank for each child. While this form of reporting is now considered inadequate (though many parents generally still prefer it as a basis for reporting) there appears to be no reason why a teacher’s cumulative knowledge about their students should not be a key component of assessing and reporting using outcomes.

The Professional Teachers’ Council NSW argued in their submission, teachers need to feel that what they are doing is worthwhile. Unless the purpose of teachers’ work is clear there is a disequilibrium between the effort and the reward. The Professional Teachers’ Council NSW argued that the introduction of portfolios was the best example of this potential conflict of purpose, with many teachers asking ‘Why am I putting this together rather than teaching my children?’.

### 4.8.2 What makes for good reporting?

It is fair to say that good reporting emerges from consistent teacher judgements developed through collegial and shared understandings of student achievement. Yet the reporting of learning remains a very complex and contentious matter. Reports that are manageable for teachers, and well-received by parents:

- have user-friendly formats and language;
- use a variety of ways to communicate with parents, eg. parent teacher interviews, portfolios, Basic Skills Tests results, end of year reports, email and telephone;
- state clearly what students have achieved or need for further development;
- broadly report on knowledge, skills and understandings as well as personal and social skills; and,
- indicate how those achievements measure up against those expected for one or more Stages of learning, and/or the student’s age cohort.

Parents commented to the Evaluation they like to receive regular and reliable information, personal to their child, in order to make informed decision about their child’s future. One parent told the Evaluation at the end of a long group discussion on reports, “I just want to know that my child is happy at school.”



Questions raised during school visits and through the website survey focused on the number of assessment tasks that need reporting, the types of reporting to be used, and how often.

Traditional end of year (summative) reports still have a place and are used by most schools at least once a year. Interim reports (early in the year, at midpoints and the like) have gained acceptance because of the way they involve parents more, though they may imply an increased workload. A sequence of interviews is the second staple reporting strategy, and highly valued by parents and teachers, though both groups regret that these tend to be rushed affairs. Schools who creatively make more time for interviews as well as flexible arrangements for working parents were well regarded. Three-way interviews were also seen by most parents as very helpful. Portfolios have become an extremely common and most recently adopted strategy in many schools (discussed in detail below). The Australian Council for Educational Research has noted how portfolios, used well, can be a way of showing the ‘deeper knowledge’ a student has gained, not just the recall of ‘facts’.

Most schools have developed a sequence of reporting that employs all of the above, on a cyclical format. All this is hard work for schools and the home. As one primary teacher explained:

*We’re assessing to report to parents, but for them to understand it they almost have to be us.*

Parents have very high hopes for the reports they receive on their children. One observation, made during one of the interviews with a group of parents, was how outcomes assessment and reporting did not necessarily assist parents set educational and career goals for their children. One parent wrote in her submission:

*While the system may well be good in theory, in practice it becomes a curriculum statement when a child is in the top 20% of a class. Children who tend to learn easily most if not everything a teacher presents, end up with identical reports with the ticks all in the same boxes, year after year.*

Teachers, too, saw outcomes as not providing parents with a complete report on what their child did at school. One Primary teacher summarised it thus:

*“Where’s the whole picture?” is what they (parents) ask.*

It hardly seems necessary to assess every single outcome, then to report on each in the same amount of detail for each. Schools that redrafted outcomes into generic statements - and kept reports simple - appeared to find the reporting process less stressful and more sustainable. Strongly stated guidelines from the Department about the essential elements of a report could help refocus teachers’ work as well as provide the benefits of a more standardised reporting framework across the State, reducing the level of inconsistency or replication. Comments made by all sectors responding to this Evaluation make it clear that such a move would be very welcome.

### 4.8.3 Reporting to parents and school communities

The Evaluation recognised the need to gauge the response of parent and community groups to outcomes assessment and reporting. In looking at reporting in particular, we wanted to understand what it is the community wants and finds informative. Whereas schools may have become more keenly interested in the progress of individual students, it is not clear that society has moved away from a less competitive stance derived from its understanding of the competition that exists for training, further and higher education, employment and other types of rewards.



While schools are highly conscientious and professional in the way they meet their obligations to report to parents, the nature of that reporting may still not fully satisfy parents. Reporting is no easy matter as the following comment from a primary school teacher makes clear:

*Parents have to be 'out there asking' for information because I have to bridge that gap (between classroom activity and what the school reports). This is hard for most working parents.*

What became clear to the Evaluation was the desire for schools to report to parents and the community at broad levels, but schools found this difficult given the alleged 'mandatory' requirements. The submission by the Federation of Parent and Citizens' Associations of NSW supported our finding that few parents acknowledged giving much attention to pages of outcomes on their child's report. This often became worse for some parents when their child moved into secondary education. A parent commented:

*Anything to make reporting better would help. Secondary parents are a little lost when they come to High School after being welcomed in Primary and usually being able to find their child's teacher if they wanted to know something. The very size of High Schools means that there is little if any personal contact.*

Most parents see the teacher interview as the crucial element helping them to come to a clear view about the progress being made by their child. Parents valued a range of opportunities to find out about progress at different times of the year, or Stage. One parent wrote:

*I find the best way is an interview with the teacher. I like to take the report and then sit with the teacher and discuss it. (...) It also means that we discuss other things that may not be directly included in the report.*

While the dominant response favoured interviews over nearly everything else, this view was not unanimous. Another parent wrote in the survey:

*Due to the brevity of the current mid-year interview, and to teachers' reluctance to always be honest in their reporting of children's problems, some parents are led to believe that all is well and subsequently are shocked to see comments to the contrary in the end-of-year reports.*

And the parent of a secondary student responded to the Evaluation survey question on what parents find useful about outcomes assessment and reporting as follows:

*As there is very little assessment and reporting offered to parents, it is difficult to answer this question. Of the minimal feedback to parents, the mid-year face-to-face interview with the class teacher, although frustratingly short (10 minutes) in duration, would be the most useful offering, although its value is greatly diminished by parents having no prior feedback from staff on which to follow up.*

On the other hand, a parent of a senior school student wrote:

*I would like to see rubrics for all assignments outlining the criteria and describing how the criteria are to be met.*

Where reports were well received by parents, schools had re-aligned their practices with community expectations and goals. What helped was a curriculum committee or assessment advisory group, with teacher (secondary and primary) and parent/community representation, that assists the school decide on the minimum required to meet best practice in this area—supported and guided by Department exemplars. One parent wrote:

*I don't think it should be the school's responsibility to design reports. Some do it very thoroughly, others not so. If curriculum documents are centrally written and distributed to schools, then so should reports. It is a government education system, not a whole lot of independent schools.*

Teachers agreed, though in the second quote below, the teacher misunderstood the size of the Directorate referred to, and the nature of its current responsibilities which focus on the big budget item of State-wide tests:

*If all DET schools are studying the same syllabuses and all students are expected to achieve the same outcomes for each Stage, then why can't DET produce a standard report for use in all schools? [Primary teacher, Central West].*

*The KLA syllabuses are standard across the State, therefore reports formats should be as well. And the Department, with a big Assessment and Reporting Directorate, should assume some responsibility for this. [Primary teacher, New England]*

While many parents, and some teachers, argued strongly for standardised report cards for NSW, most acknowledged the need to contextualise and adapt models of best practice to each school location. This seems to be a sensible proposition, though a role is seen for a Regional Office to offer advice for not making reports so localised and specific that they make transferring between schools a risky business for families.

#### 4.8.4 Portfolios

Portfolios are a collection of student work, directed by the teacher, and managed in part by the student. Portfolios include samples of assessment tasks and other forms of student work, mostly (but not always) 'best pieces'. Portfolios are intended to provide rich data on student performance of outcomes, to encourage better teaching through focusing on development of each child's ability, and the adoption of high standards in classroom activity. In addition, portfolios are seen to be an ideal form of communication with the child's home about the level of achievement demonstrated for outcomes for each Key Learning Area. One parent told the Evaluation:

*The portfolio is great as it gives a wide range of what my child is capable of doing. It is more detailed than a normal report card.*

The use of portfolios in education and training has a long history. The idea became popular in the United States of America alongside the outcomes-based education movement in the 1980s, perhaps best reported in studies on the Vermont Assessment Portfolio Program (CRESST, 1992, 1993). Adopted in Australia as part of a suite of reforms during the 1990s, portfolios were not intended for State-wide assessment as in Vermont. However, schools in NSW are beginning to use portfolio work under the Consistent Teacher Judgement program in a way that allows comparable measurement information across schools, though this is very tentative.

While portfolios were suggested as an option by the then Director-General, Dr Ken Boston, in his 1996 Memorandum, they were never intended to be mandatory. Yet our data did not reveal any Primary government schools that do not use portfolios. In many schools they are seen to be an effective means for letting students know how they are progressing and for parents to understand the skills and knowledge their child is gaining at school. They are something to show grandparents and/or family friends, and parents told us of the pride and enthusiasm with which their child showed and explained their portfolio work. It is undoubtedly the case that portfolios have their place and what they have to offer, when well-assembled, is much appreciated.

We found portfolios to be the major component of assessment and reporting in primary schools but with a great variety of formats. Typical portfolios include anything from a dozen to scores of items. Sometimes only mathematics and English are represented, though typically there are samples of work from most KLAs. Sometimes tasks are always completed in class time; others are completed at home. Mostly portfolios contain ‘best pieces’, rarely examples of where students made mistakes. Few portfolios the Evaluation saw were organised to contain work samples that showed growth through multiple pieces on the one assessment task or related tasks.

In schools enormous effort went into producing portfolios that showed outcomes achieved by every student so that, as one northern hinterland primary principal explained:

*No-one goes home with their portfolios feeling bad.*

Generally, portfolios were seen as a positive event for low ability students, or students with low self-esteem. However, students generally have class work books that show the good and bad of everyday work and many parents told us they turn to these for a more accurate picture of how their child is going. The Evaluation did wonder why student workbooks were not in more favour as a true record of student progress.

Problems arising from portfolios identified by the Evaluation include the time taken to produce work for the portfolios, time that is taken away from other aspects of the curriculum and school day. Teachers also spend time ensuring that the portfolios contain all they think they should, and are ready to take home (sometimes four times a year). Some teachers and students considered the effort students put into re-writing is somewhat wasteful and tedious. Finding the time and space to keep records, tracking progress and store evidence is an emerging problem for schools, and some parents were even complaining about needing the space at home to collect and keep portfolios.

One powerful argument put to us was that portfolios were not always well-aligned with improving classroom practice. Whereas teaching to outcomes was intended to get teachers to focus on ensuring that they geared work towards the needs, interests and capacities of their children, too many assessment tasks appear to be activities designed simply to test minimal performance (or achievement) of an outcome. Some schools appear to have spent so much time programming and planning the tasks to fit syllabus objectives that they have run out of time to design challenging and interesting tasks to extend and challenge students to show they can ‘achieve’ or ‘work beyond’.

A number of parents questioned what portfolios really told them. In interviews and submissions, parents saw the limited range of reporting - with most students getting ‘working towards’ or ‘achieving’ scales for most of their primary schooling - as too vague and unhelpful as indicators of how to help their child improve on what they cannot do. Some parents suspected that assessment tasks distracted teachers from getting on with their teaching and learning. Given the level of appreciation of portfolios, it was a surprise to the Evaluation that parents were counting the cost. A typical parent comment along these lines, made at a school with exceptional Basic Skill Test results, was:

*I’d rather my child is being taught, rather than the teacher preparing this huge document (sic).*

What some parents call “all those bits of paper” are not always as valued as teachers expect them to be, given the effort that goes into producing portfolios. The problem of evidence for outcomes assessment and reporting is still unresolved in many schools unless their students’ work samples illustrate what is taught and what is assessed, and thus accurately (and almost totally) reflect what the child is learning.

The timing of portfolios taken home was another issue. One inner city parent observed:

*Portfolios are good but we only get to see them at the end of the year when it's too late to address any problems.*

Portfolios should not be disproportionately emphasised in relation to other forms of reporting. Portfolios, if used well, can provide a guide to a student's progress and demonstrate to the child, teacher and parent a sequence of development that highlights areas of improvement and needing attention. And they form a very important additional talking point when interviews are held with parents.

Questions requiring further direction from the NSW Department of Education and Training include the purpose of portfolios, their potential for impact on programming and teaching, the type and amount of evidence and work samples to be included, the extent to which they should replace other forms of assessment, and the balance between assessing, collecting evidence, and actually teaching. In the Vermont study, 'over 80% of fourth-grade teachers and over 60% of eighth-grade teachers often had difficulty covering the required curriculum because they were weighed down by portfolios' (CRESST / RAND, 1992, p. 45). If this is true for NSW, then there is an urgent need for clear and unambiguous direction to be given to schools by the NSW Department of Education and Training.

#### 4.8.5 Tracking and transitions

The transition between primary and secondary levels of schooling is another area where difficulties are being experienced in relation to outcomes assessment and reporting. Primary and secondary teachers told us how "students seem to 'start again' beginning Year 7. There's not a 'handing on' so students don't pick up where they left off". One reason for this is the lack of consistency in nomenclature used for Stage 1-3 and 4-6 syllabus and support material. Primary and secondary teachers do not yet speak the same assessment and reporting language. Yet a secondary principal from the New England area, who highly valued the assessment work of primary schools, told us:

*Secondary schools want students to "hit the high school deck running, not be treated as a 'clean slate'".*

One of the areas least developed in the implementation of outcomes assessment and reporting is the way outcomes recorded for each student can be tracked from year to year and Stage-to-Stage. This is generally an area that has been put in the 'too hard' basket, as it requires significant human and capital resources.

The Department has begun to address this issue through the Linkages program. In general, teachers saw this program as assisting them to make better decisions about the connections between Stages 3 and 4, as well as about how the transition to secondary school might impact on each child.

In the St George District of metropolitan Sydney, development has been under way for twelve months of a program called "School Transition Enterprise Management System" [STEMS]. STEMS is the District's tool for managing student transition between primary school and high school. STEMS imports the entire K-6 enrolment and is applicable for carrying over that data into secondary school. It includes academic achievement fields using outcomes assessment as well as Basic Skills Tests, Reading Recovery Level, Computer Skills Assessment, and the Schedule for Early Number Assessment tests. The student support profile provides social and health data, as well as learning support and behaviour modification information. For the St George District, a student survey has been included to gauge student intentions and attitudes to school.

The advantage of STEMS is that data can be added or changed at any time. Schools can sort, search and report using this data looking, for example, to see whether students were enrolled in parallel, graded, composite or Staged classes. Absences are easily recorded and accessed. As enrolments change, they are entered into OASIS as normal and imported into STEMS. The transfer of data to the District Office is quick and simple. There is clearly scope for exploring the usefulness of this program State-wide especially as new Regions are established. However, OASIS is under review with a new package that addresses the things OASIS cannot do, so STEMS may not be a suitable State-wide solution.

The possibility of a State-wide 'one stop' software package, as foreshadowed in the draft version of the Department's Administration and Information Management for Schools [AIMS] project, would appear to provide a similar, if not better and more universally applicable package. The vision of AIMS is to support schools in terms of student record data (including attendance, academic results, behaviour records and any other associated records from the school counsellor or principal notes) as well as finance records. It is proposed that AIMS will allow student records to be accessed through a student identification number. When a student moves from school to school the records could be immediately available through a centralised data bank. AIMS seems to be a worthwhile project that has yet to be supported by significant funding. Even if funded for 2004, the project would take 3-5 years to roll out to all government schools, so a decision by those with the expertise to judge is needed soon.

The Early Childhood Education Council of NSW and the NSW Primary Principals' Association alerted the Evaluation to transition issues affecting students as they move between Years 2 and 3, sometimes on to different school sites or across the playground to the Primary school buildings. The NSW Secondary Principals' Council saw the Year 10-11 transition as just as significant as that into secondary school, and in this comment queried the role of the School Certificate in preparing students for the senior school.

#### 4.8.6 ICT and its role in reporting

Most schools visited for the Evaluation reported favourably on the amount of IT equipment now available to staff and students in NSW Government schools. Schools have dedicated IT access rooms, ready access in common and staff rooms, library access and laptop programs. Schools are developing homepage services that provide access to school documentation regarding assessment and reporting. The internet has become an important mode of communication with students and their families and soon these resources will be supported by Broadband access, multiplying by a significant degree their effectiveness.

The Evaluation found, in general, schools that had progressed furthest or most effectively with outcomes assessment and reporting were schools that had employed ICT tools to some extent for recording and reporting on student assessment. The Basic Skills Testing program has been useful in providing an example of how this might be done, and some schools have changed their report format and appearance to mirror that of the Basic Skills Tests. Most ICT tools used to assist with outcomes assessment and reporting, apart from the now completed *Kidmap* pilot, were developed by teachers in their school, or by parents with appropriate skills, or are expensive commercial products.

In the minds of teachers working in schools, *Kidmap* did not seem capable of delivering what they wanted, namely a straightforward delivery system able to be flexibly employed. It became clear that much more scoping work needs to be undertaken which would see a review of school experiences with *Kidmap* and other tracking programs. An optimum solution is yet to be found. Teacher-initiated programs, while often helpful, depend too much on the knowledge of one staff member who sooner or later will leave the school removing thereby the expertise to maintain the software program. Of even more concern, in these one-off one-person projects, educational decisions are being made by someone focused primarily on making a spreadsheet work. In most examples viewed by the Evaluation, a broader involvement would have led to a better product. Parent-designed examples tend to be trials of a product to sell more broadly, so the school's needs can become subsumed within this wider intention. Commercial products are popular, but can suffer from lack of adaptability. A principal from the Central Coast wrote:

*Teachers should have access to high quality, effective technology-based systems that enable them to develop assessment tasks, record student achievement and conduct analysis of student attainment in a time-effective manner. The Department or Board should have a web site (or CD ROM resource) with a variety of assessment tasks linked to outcomes in all Stages so teachers can readily construct a suitable assessment program that is syllabus-based and variable. Teachers should at least have access to technology that reduces their workload.*

This advice seems most sensible.

The Evaluation did come across examples of ICT tools that are worth pursuing, though we believe these should be monitored by the NSW Department of Education and Training with a view to establishing a list of approved ICT software for use by NSW government schools. Effective and efficient ICT programs for an outcomes-based reporting system enable reporting using a single student data entry template. The aim is to produce reports, preferably simultaneously, on a client-server platform that minimises the reporting period workload on teachers and administration staff.

Workable ICT reporting programs have outcomes prepared by Key Learning Areas and are preferably arranged by Stage, though by class seem to be more common. Manageable programs strictly limit the number of outcomes per course and provide for generic whole school / whole child outcomes. Programs valued by teachers allowed them to enter data from remote locations (staff room, library, home etc.) and have minimal steps. The administration staff normally enter attendance details and the like. When all this is completed, the system should be able to collate easily and flexibly. Finally, for a system to be truly worthwhile, it should support archival records so that a student's history can be maintained and checked at a moment's notice.

School executive also reported ICT systems as providing them with new levels of "control" over the reporting process as well as for ensuring syllabus coverage by classes in each Stage and across Stages. Some teachers supported this as providing better equity though it could be seen as impinging on their professionalism and individualism. The development of the Administration Information Management System, noted above, holds promise for a State-wide product that will move schools forward from OASIS and incorporate tracking systems and flexible ways of reporting.



A secondary teacher, on the South Coast, suggested:

*All high schools should follow a State-wide reporting system using new technology so that each school does not waste valuable resources of time and experience having to reinvent processes every decade.*

A primary teacher from North Sydney wrote:

*Computerised reporting that links to assessment record is essential if parents are to be given a full report without teachers spending inordinate amounts of time compiling the report. Using computerised recording systems also allows a profile of a student to be built up making planning appropriate teaching programs easier.*

### 4.8.7 The student record card

One issue raised in school visits was that the Student Record Cards were potentially anachronistic except for the time when students move between schools. While the information on these cards was still useful for schools, much was replicated on OASIS and on school assessment records. ICT has made recording, processing and archiving information on students much more flexible.

Discussions in the Department about changing the card in the context of electronic recording and reporting need to be accelerated. The work on AIMS might be of help here. While there may be issues that need to be referred to the legal branch of the NSW Department of Education and Training, removing the paper record card could reduce workload for teachers already committing significant time to assessment and reporting tasks. Schools are extremely uncomfortable at completing a wide array of assessment and reporting processes, only to then find they have to fill in further cards seen as hopelessly out-of-date. This position needs attention.

## 4.9 Support and professional development

### Overview

While the Evaluation has shown that the demands being placed on teachers in regard to assessment and reporting based on new syllabuses have been considerable and, for many, somewhat stressful, there is no reason to believe that, with help, schools cannot get the situation under control and manage new directions with confidence. The experience of the Evaluation has been that many schools are managing the changes in a thoroughly competent way. The challenge remains of how to improve the performance of all schools, while at the same time allowing space for those wanting to lead into new directions to do so. Guidance with flexibility is seen to be the key, along with support for teachers so that they can make an even stronger professional contribution.

The Evaluation reached the conclusion that there is a clear and unequivocal need for schools to receive guidance, direction and support about syllabus outcomes for assessment and reporting in K-6 Key Learning Areas and for Stages 4 and 5 in Secondary schools. As well as specific direction on using outcomes assessment and reporting effectively and efficiently, schools need to be better equipped to understand how the Stages provide a mechanism for continuity in curriculum and for students' growth as they progress through school.



A degree (in some cases a high degree) of frustration was encountered by the Evaluation resulting from the lack of quality professional development teachers feel they have been able to access. While many teachers praised the professional development they have received, the qualification was that the expectations raised were unrealistic. Traditional forms of professional development, taking teachers out of their classroom and school to be ‘inserviced’ by a systemic or consultant ‘expert’, were not highly valued by those who responded to this Evaluation. ‘Training-the-Trainer’ came in for even harsher criticism. The views presented in our data called for schools to work together, perhaps in clusters or networks along the lines organised through the National Schools Network, so that teachers can think beyond the local context and get access to sound alternatives and then develop options that support their school’s philosophy and that of the community. Information and Communication Technology is one tool for achieving collaboration between schools without teachers leaving the school grounds.

#### 4.9.1 School and system needs and professionalism

Enhanced support and professional development opportunities for teachers will result not just in improved practices in individual schools but also in greater consistency in reporting processes across schools. As the principal from a large Primary school in Southern Sydney wrote:

*Although I realise that much of what we do in assessment and reporting is left up to individual schools to best cater for the particular school’s community, I know that teachers and principals crave for more definite direction in this area rather than re-inventing the wheel in every school.*

‘Re-inventing the wheel’ was a recurring theme in the course of this Evaluation. ‘Re-invention’ was seen as unproductive work for schools in a large government system that should have the resources to avoid unnecessary duplication. Though mixing the metaphor, the same issue was thoughtfully described by a Deputy Principal from a large coastal town as:

*Too often schools develop good things in isolation from each other so we are not harvesting the intellectual capital of our profession effectively.*

Resourcing is a fundamental element in leading schools towards an acceptable level in successful implementation of major initiatives of which outcomes assessment and reporting must rank as the most significant. Given the limited implementation support available, many schools have drawn on other sources of funding such as the NSW Government’s Priority School Funding Project and the Country Area Program. What became clear was that \$10,000 could make a real difference to the extent and depth of effective implementation in an individual school of outcomes assessment and reporting.

Given the emphasis on standards and accountability in new outcomes policy, these issues are doubly important. For the Department, the Regions and Districts to effectively introduce and maintain change in assessment and reporting practices, the desired changes need to build on a sound base of existing teacher professional judgements about assessment, while shifting the emphasis from summative and quantitative/comparative to qualitative/individualised methods. This is no small task. And it is appropriate that attention be drawn to Recommendations 14-16 in *Focusing on Learning* (dealing with Professional Development) which retain their relevance for this Evaluation.

Clearer guidelines about outcomes assessment and reporting and their purpose, and more direct assistance for managing it all, are the first objectives for further implementation in NSW government schools. Supported by syllabuses and work samples that underpin new strategies, teachers will be able to manage their time better given the scope and magnitude of the task. However, enhancing professional commitment to, and individual valuing of, an outcomes approach, is just as important as practical help. One secondary principal saw the relationship this way:

*It's the principal's responsibility to create conditions for teacher learning in the same way that it is the teacher's responsibility to create conditions for the learning of their pupils.*

A teacher from a primary school wrote in the Evaluation survey that implementation at his school was successful because the school has:

*A very supportive Principal who allows staff who are confident to really explore and trial different methods while also allowing staff who are not confident, or who fear change, to have a goal to work to over time.*

In schools that have progressed well down the outcomes path, sound and adventurous leadership was apparent. Leadership at the school level, supported by Departmental monitoring, should help shift the notion of teachers working solely as individual professionals in a closed classroom, to one where teachers cooperate with each other and come to accept “outsider” attempts to influence their teaching as an opportunity for further professional development.

The NSW Teachers Federation oral presentation recommended a ‘community of schools’ approach. Such an approach provides a higher degree of cooperation and shared understandings about assessment and reporting than what has been achieved already in many schools. The role of informal and formal collegiates in some areas of NSW was seen as encompassing this task. A teacher of English from a secondary school in Sydney’s West suggested that what is needed is:

*A forum with leaders at schools across districts who are serious about outcomes-based reporting and making it work in the classroom. (Let's) pool our good ideas and get a team of people to either inservice at District level or to work in schools for a period of time. I suggest that we need in each district an assessment and reporting curriculum advisor.*

However, not all submissions were as optimistic. A secondary student welfare head teacher mused:

*The size of the mentality shift in some schools is simply too difficult where the Secondary mould has become inflexible, defensive, wary and reluctant. These teachers simply identify in general terms as subject specialists rather than educators per se. This paradigm needs to be understood for change to take place, but the experts responsible for training are often from a Primary School background. It is difficult for them to lead change within the hard-headed Secondary environment even though their expertise in the areas is huge.*

The Evaluation identified the need to reduce pressures from consultants over-selling their particular Key Learning Areas. According to the NSW Primary Principals' Association, some consultants have pushed each Key Learning Area in a way that the curriculum has become 'Balkanised', with new and unrelated efforts made each year in different KLAs and other areas of schoolwork such as Child Protection Legislation. In other examples, Primary and Secondary schools told us they felt at sea with not enough, or incomplete, assistance, so that "we have to work too hard to interpret what to do". In the best cases, District Officers and the Superintendent worked to unify the district and generate a common interest and direction in school improvement. Overall, Districts were seen as a useful organisational strategy. As the restructure proceeds, maximum advantage should be drawn from their replacement.

While much of the work of a District Office is focused on curriculum, schools saw the emphasis (at least up to the first half of 2003) on quantitative measures of assessment, and less on learning. There is a need to refocus the work of District Offices (or their replacement) on curriculum as it is broadly defined and practised in schools, while not adding more work to that already undertaken by District Officers. The restructure will need to address this issue. Focusing on curriculum and not just on management issues will be most necessary.

## 4.10 Concluding comment

A very detailed account has been given of the wide range of issues to emerge from the various sources of data tapped by the Evaluation. Throughout this discussion it will be apparent that the goal of our analysis has been to identify how to build on successful practices, thereby establishing a framework for future developments relating to outcomes assessment and reporting. In the final Section of this Report, various Recommendations are put forward which we hope will result in a very positive return from the Evaluation and reward all those who have made a contribution.

## 5. Summary of conclusions and recommendations

### Introduction

There may be those outside schools, looking in, who have the view that schools have survived all the economic and social upheavals of the last decade and a half without much variation in their practices. They are wrong, as those who have children passing through schools well know. The extent of change is reflected in the findings of the present Evaluation via the number of requests received to have schools revert to “practices which operated when I was at school”. Perhaps if our communities had more insight into what teachers do in schools and the reasons for their actions and the policies being pursued, we would have much greater support for our teachers and their efforts on behalf of our children.

Even during the limited life of the current Evaluation (from February till mid-August) major changes have been foreshadowed which will affect the way Recommendations made will be implemented.

Perhaps the most recent change of greatest importance has been the release by the NSW Department of Education and Training of its restructuring proposals under the title *Lifelong Learning: The Future of Public Education in NSW* (released for comment in July). The proposal is “designed to further improve the standard of public education in NSW”, and, capitalizing on the benefits of a regional structure, “give teachers the educational support they need through access in their regions to a greater range of curriculum experts, each with the authority and experience to assist principals and schools”. Each education support centre to be established will have a number of chief education officers focusing on teaching and learning. At a central level, “the proposed Teaching and Learning Portfolio will offer curriculum support and further the ongoing professional development of teachers in schools” ... and “deliver to school and TAFE staff a State-wide professional development strategy, delivered either on-line or through regional offices and education support centres”.

It can be confidently expected that a major task for those who manage and work in the new Teaching and Learning Portfolio, and for those who work in regional offices and in education support centres, will be to respond to the agreed recommendations in this Report and determine a coordinated approach which will maximize the benefits for schools. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the Evaluation could not have taken place at a better time for schools in New South Wales, for these reasons alone.

But there are other grounds for being optimistic. It has already been pointed out that during the life of the Evaluation we became very conscious of “a changing climate” and there now exists a greater desire to give a stronger focus to improving assessment and reporting practices to the advantage of individual students. Much has been learnt since the 1995 Review *Focusing on Learning* and there exists a sound base from which to develop manageable, well-framed assessment strategies and reporting processes. The NSW Department of Education and Training submission summed up the prospects as follows:

*Now that schools and the curriculum are further developed in understanding the issues, there is a significant need to provide consolidation and definitive direction.*

The Recommendations in this Report are designed to assist the addressing of that need.

While further change is almost upon us, there are other developments just around the corner which will demand consideration as priorities are set. Recently (26/6/03) the Federal Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson, has spoken of the need for “much more national consistency in education .... the Commonwealth will be starting a process which we envisage will take six or seven years on target by 2010 to drive Australia’s eight different educational jurisdictions to one education system for Australia ... We don’t necessarily want children in every part of the country reading the same books and doing precisely the same curriculum, but we surely need to move to National consistency in outcomes and let’s at the very least start with literacy, reading skills, writing skills, numeracy and perhaps science”. The Minister received strong support for his plans at the July 2003 meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs held in Perth, Western Australia.

The drive for greater national consistency is strongly supported and, indeed one of the authors of the present Report worked extensively on the development of a possible common curriculum framework flowing out of the then Australian Education Council (of Ministers) resolution to: “strengthen further the effective collaboration which has occurred to date to enable greater effectiveness and efficiency in curriculum through the sharing of knowledge and scarce curriculum development resources across systems ... and ... remove unnecessary differences in the curriculum between systems”. (A more detailed account of what occurred in the early work is given in Eltis (1993).)

It is important not to forget that, while the earlier attempt began at a measured pace, as the exercise gained momentum vital consultation time was not provided. The project moved well away from “curriculum guidelines” into profiles designed to provide a series of descriptive statements or indicators, arranged in progressive levels of achievement, to be used subsequently as a means of reporting on student progress and achievement in given areas of the curriculum. The National Statements and Profiles Plan was ambitious and too hastily contrived. Too much faith was placed in the validity of the profiles and the observation by the NSW Director-General of School Education in 1995 that “the learning area profiles are not ‘perfect’” came too late. Difficulties had already been created as a result of the decision in 1993 for NSW to incorporate the National profile outcomes, with NSW additions, into NSW Syllabuses and these difficulties were clearly evident in the 1995 Review *Focusing on Learning*.

What are the lessons to be learnt? First, there is real merit in thinking nationally. Systems can help one another but school curricula in the various States and Territories have a long history and those who teach them know and reflect this history. As has been said earlier in the Report, it is dangerous to assume that we can easily transfer one set of whole system approaches to another. Second, curriculum change requires time – not just to develop appropriate materials and to introduce and explain them and, then, to give teachers and schools time and support to help them feel comfortable both with their teaching and with their assessment of students. Third, much has been learned in recent years as schools have worked to reform their programs with a focus on outcomes and not just inputs. It is important that, as we attempt in New South Wales to capitalize on our experiences, we do not confound the picture by super-imposing too hastily yet more pressures and demands on schools by suddenly re-defining the basis of our curriculum offerings. The problem is not necessarily as the Federal Minister recently described it:

*One of the problems that you come up against of course is that whereas each one of the State’s and Territories might agree in principle to move towards National consistency they want the rest of the country to be like their State. (26/6/03).*

What each of the States will want is a manageable curriculum, assessment and reporting program which can be pursued with confidence, assisting teachers to follow best practice, students to enjoy and benefit from their learning, and parents to see how well their children are progressing and where they need encouragement. To achieve National consistency demands that we revisit across the country what we consider best practice in terms of curriculum, assessment and reporting, share our experiences and arrive at consensus on what needs to be done in each of our systems. This needs to be a progressive task and one in which the experiences of schools, principals, teachers and students, drive the agenda. Failure to acknowledge the importance of a school-focused approach will result in another failure to arrive at National consistency in the curriculum, and that will be a sad outcome for Australia.

This is not to suggest that there is no need to involve in the process those with particular expertise in measurement. However, we could not agree with the comment made during discussions at the Australian Council for Educational Research in reference to workload problems and “a fragmented curriculum” as emerged in the 1990s, “that if the change to outcomes had been driven by measurement people not by curriculum people some of the problems may not have arisen”. Bringing together curriculum and measurement expertise will be the key to success whether we are working at a State level or towards National consistency.

So, while it is seen as important for New South Wales to respond positively to initiatives put forward in the national interest, it is equally important that we continue to press ahead and do our best to learn from schools’ experiences as reflected in the present Evaluation. As the inter-State visits carried out as part of the present data gathering showed, the problems each State is facing are not dissimilar and all will doubtless welcome advice designed to overcome their problems. How their resolution might then be effected will depend on the circumstances applying in each State.

There was one other significant announcement made during the course of this Evaluation which could have profound significance for the way Recommendations flowing from this Evaluation are given priority. The State Minister announced in Parliament, as reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 4/7/03, that the Board of Studies NSW would be proceeding with a review of its secondary syllabuses for years 7-10 throughout 2004 so that new content and emphases would be introduced in 2005. This would be “the largest curriculum overhaul in 30 years of Years 7-10” and would require “all students to be tested on each subject and measured against yardsticks”. Obviously, any action flowing from the present Evaluation will need to be coordinated in such a way as not to disrupt other plans for adjusting the content of the secondary curriculum but, more importantly, to avoid further overload on teachers who could be threatened yet again by “demand overload”.

## 5.1 Background to the Evaluation

The Recommendations presented below have been prepared in the context of the **Terms of Reference** for the Evaluation which were stated as follows:

In addition to clarifying and restating the educational value of an outcomes approach to improving teaching and learning, the Evaluation study will:

- assess the impact different approaches to recording and reporting have had on the workload of primary teachers;
- assess the extent to which such approaches acknowledge the primacy of teachers’ professional judgement;



- identify the features and characteristics of best practice models;
- assess the clarity and usefulness of various models of reporting to parents;
- provide advice about the nature of support required to promote best practice within the context of a manageable workload; and,
- provide advice on the implications for school-based assessment, recording and reporting in Years 7 to 10.

The Evaluation focused on what has been occurring since 1995 in government schools, though evidence and submissions put to the Evaluation indicated clearly that the issues and problems being addressed were indeed shared by schools outside the government school sector. Oral presentations and submissions from professional associations and special interest groups highlighted this point.

Various strategies were used to gather data to inform the Evaluation so that we were able to assemble a valid picture of what has been occurring in primary and secondary schools:

- analysis of various syllabuses and support documents prepared by the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training;
- a review of materials used for professional development;
- a detailed literature search (including a web-based search) of relevant comment on outcomes and reporting in relation to curriculum;
- a web-based search of curriculum developments nationally and internationally;
- a web-based survey of teachers, principals and parents;
- analyses of written submissions made in response to an invitation to contribute to the Evaluation;
- a series of school visits to a variety of primary and secondary schools throughout the State;
- discussions with educational authorities (responsible for schools and curriculum) in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, and a visit to the Australian Council for Educational Research in Melbourne; and,
- discussions with key interest groups.

The Evaluation cast its net wide and was given much encouragement by all those who participated in the data-gathering and consultation processes. In addition, input came from a Reference Group chaired by the Assistant Director-General (Schools/Primary Education) and consisting of representatives from the NSW Teachers Federation, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, the Office of the Board of Studies NSW, the NSW Primary Principals' Association, the Public Schools Principals Forum, the NSW Secondary Principals' Council, and a member of the Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training.

The Reference Group assisted by reviewing the proposed strategies for conducting the Evaluation, considering the questions to be asked in surveys and on the web-site, and providing advice on the schools proposed for visits by the Evaluation Team. Of particular importance was the response by the Reference Group to the key areas to be addressed in the findings and Recommendations of the Review. It is emphasised that the Reference Group was not responsible for preparing the Recommendations. The Evaluation Team maintained an independent stance throughout the conduct of the study.



## 5.2 Strategic recommendations

The Recommendations which follow are grouped around six major themes:

1. Adjusting Curriculum Demands
2. Assisting Schools
3. Building Effective Assessment and Reporting Strategies
4. Tracking and Retaining Data on Student Progress
5. Supporting Teachers
6. The Teaching Profession.

This Evaluation was asked to focus on matters relating to outcomes, curriculum, assessment and reporting and the Recommendations target these areas. There are pressures from other sources which may affect teacher workload but these are not dealt with here. However, by making a significant attack on curriculum-related concerns we should be able to create time for schools to respond in a more balanced way to the vast array of demands placed upon them. We propose that this can be achieved by pursuing a set of enabling and strategic recommendations set out below in each of the areas addressed.

### 5.2.1 Adjusting curriculum demands

The detailed account given in Section 4 of this Report shows clearly much has been achieved in schools in relation to using outcomes to guide curriculum planning and reporting on student progress. It is not unreasonable to conclude that outcomes as a basis for assisting teaching and learning have been welcomed in New South Wales, as elsewhere in the world, as a way of having students “pursue deeper knowledge rather than display just the ability to recall facts” (comment made during the visit to the Australian Council for Educational Research). There are, too, much more coherent approaches being followed to enhance curriculum assessment and reporting. As well, the quality of advice available to schools on the performance of their students through State-wide testing programs has been greatly improved.

But balancing demands in a busy school day remains a critical problem. Is it possible to assist teachers to cope with the problems of the ‘over-pressured school day’ by making adjustments to factors which come in ‘from outside’ and create pressures for them? That is, is it possible to reduce external pressures and thereby liberate teachers somewhat to enable them to find time to pursue creative and innovative approaches to teaching, assessment and reporting? The Evaluation believes this is possible, but the solution will require a response not just from the NSW Department of Education and Training, which established the Evaluation. In some of what now follows there are serious questions about the role of the Board of Studies NSW and the impact of their decisions on what system authorities are seeking to do. It has proved impossible to avoid the question of the role of the Board of Studies NSW as it arose during the course of the Evaluation.

### 5.2.1.1 Linking curriculum development and implementation

From the perspective of those who responded to the Evaluation there appear to be too many players not working together to provide coordinated and coherent advice to schools. Government schools are on the receiving end of advice from the Board of Studies NSW, along with detailed syllabuses for implementation, while at the same time they receive directions from the Director-General of Education and Training. In Section 4.4, in particular, comment is made about the need for greater coordination in the writing and delivery of syllabuses, as well as the desirability of having those responsible for curriculum development work as closely as possible with those responsible for supporting implementation. Problems arising from perceived poor communication on the part of people in key curriculum areas of both organizations have led to a frustrated profession feeling it is the victim of “advice overload”. What makes things even worse is that the advice from the various sources is seen to be conflicting, as the discussion on what is or is not mandatory in syllabuses has clearly shown.

Vinson came to the conclusion (R 2.4, p. 104) that it would be preferable to see the Office of the Board of Studies NSW integrated into the NSW Department of Education and Training which would still give the Board of Studies NSW the degree of independence protected by its status as a statutory authority while at the same time the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Minister would be able to question the practical feasibility of proposed changes and support successful implementation of curriculum proposals (p. 104). This is a helpful suggestion, but there may be other possibilities.

Whatever the solution, it is critical that steps be taken to overcome the problems created for government schools arising from the apparent lack of coordination between initiatives taken by the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training.

The Evaluation strongly recommends:

**R1: That the Minister for Education and Training be asked to review ways in which better linkage and greater cohesion can be brought about in the activities of the Office of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training so that schools receive consistent curriculum advice, implementable syllabuses, and timely support for implementation as new documents are produced.**

### 5.2.1.2 Clarification of requirements

While schools have spoken very positively about the value of offering outcomes as a basis for determining learning tasks for the students and subsequent reporting to parents, they are very confused as to the status of the outcomes included in all syllabuses. Are they all mandatory?

The Evaluation strongly recommends:

**R2: That a review be undertaken of all K-6 syllabuses, with strong input from teachers in schools, to determine what outcomes should be defined as mandatory for teaching, assessing and reporting purposes, with an emphasis on making teaching across all Key Learning Areas manageable.**

### 5.2.1.3 Reducing levels of prescription

The determination of a limited set of mandatory outcomes is designed to free up teacher time to allow more time to be spent in planning for teaching and the devising of innovative learning tasks for students in all areas of the curriculum. There is no intention to reduce rigour in the curriculum; rather, the aim is to have teachers and students make more productive use of their time and not be tempted to “flit from outcome to outcome”, not always being sure of how much is being learnt by individual students.

The defining of mandatory outcomes needs to be done by looking at demands across all K-6 syllabuses and an achievable set of prescriptions arrived at for each Stage. To manage the task, the Evaluation recommends:

- R3: That primacy be given to literacy and numeracy when defining the number of mandatory outcomes (i.e. that pride of place at each Stage be given to these two areas);**
- R4: That for the remaining Key Learning Areas the number of mandatory outcomes should allow for meaningful engagement by students with the curriculum, thereby enabling “deeper learning” to occur, and ensure that overall students enjoy a well-balanced K-6 learning program which prepares them for secondary school.**

The defining of mandatory outcomes in this way will assist the development of *Program Frameworks*, proposed below (in 5.2.2.2). Such an approach will also assist with reporting to parents (also described below) and should validate the approaches being taken already by some schools, albeit often with some uncertainty, as they seek to establish control over work load demands.

While Recommendations 3 and 4 have focused on the Syllabuses K-6, a similar approach would greatly assist secondary teachers.

- R5: The approach to defining manageable mandatory outcomes in K-6 syllabuses should be followed when secondary syllabuses are developed.**

In due course, as syllabuses come up for further revision it will be necessary to review the language of outcomes. By presenting a more limited number of mandatory outcomes, it should be possible to state in clearer language what is intended as the outcomes to be used as the basis for teaching and reporting. To review the language of all outcomes in all K-6 syllabuses, with a view to re-writing them, would be a major task and there would seem to be other priorities at present. Nevertheless, the Evaluation recommends:

- R6: That, where possible, the language in which mandatory outcomes are expressed be reviewed, to make their intent clear and enhance their prospects of being achieved, and to assist parents to understand them.**

Finally, in suggesting that mandatory outcomes be defined for each syllabus, it is important to further recommend:

- R7: That the defining of the mandatory outcomes in syllabuses should in no way be seen as putting restrictions on teachers seeking to achieve more with their classes through the pursuit of additional outcomes and enriched learning opportunities.**

Recommendations 2–7 have been framed on the basis that we are revisiting current syllabuses with a view to adopting a State-wide approach which will assist teachers in New South Wales schools. If, however, moves accelerate to adopt a Nation-wide approach to re-defining the curriculum, especially in English, Mathematics and Science, then we have a further burden.

In light of earlier experiences with National Curriculum initiatives, the Evaluation feels it important to recommend:

**R8: That cooperation in attempts to arrive at national consistency in curriculum should not result in teachers in NSW schools having imposed upon them new syllabuses which do not link with those followed at present or result in a whole new set of outcomes injected into current documents impeding the preparation of soundly-based implementation and support programs.**

## 5.2.2 Assisting schools

The recommendations set out in 5.2.1 above (Recommendations 1-7) can be seen as enabling recommendations. If we can achieve greater cohesion between the efforts of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training, and if we can arrive at a set of agreed mandatory outcomes, much will have been achieved to give back to teachers the time they are seeking to develop creative, innovative and rigorous programs of study. But there are other steps which can assist.

### 5.2.2.1 Training and professional development

Regardless of what might result from a review of the relationship between the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training, there will remain a need to ensure schools are well prepared for new syllabuses (or revised ones, in terms of mandatory requirements) and, when they appear, are able to receive helpful and professional advice on implementation.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R9: That steps be taken to bring together those directly responsible for preparing syllabuses (or revisions) and those with direct responsibility for assisting implementation, resulting in unambiguous, consistent and informative advice and support they give to schools.**

**R10: That as part of its re-structuring program, the NSW Department of Education and Training develop a clear blue-print for the operations of its new curriculum officers at Regional and central levels so that maximum support is given to schools as they seek to implement syllabuses and associated assessment and reporting programs.**

**R11: That when guidelines are developed for the support of curriculum and professional development programs for teachers, particular focus be given to ways in which schools in individual Regions can be brought together to build on shared experiences, with the identification of key staff in those schools who might play a vital Regional role.**

It was noted in the Evaluation that teachers were very critical of professional development which focused mainly on “telling” and “instructing”. Recommendations 9 and 10 envisage that the curriculum and professional development programs proposed would be very much driven by teachers themselves, with appropriate “expert input”, and would focus strongly on the analysis of teachers’ own work with their students. Not only would individual teachers benefit from their participation, they should also be able to return to their schools well able to work with their colleagues on innovative approaches to curriculum and assessment.

### 5.2.2.2 What Might be Produced for Schools: *Program Frameworks*

It has long been the practice to leave it to schools to develop their own teaching programs based on syllabuses issued to them. As so many teachers and principals said during the course of the Evaluation: we are all re-inventing the wheel.

The time may well have come when we should re-think our position on this matter and, while taking measures not to undermine teacher professionalism and independence to create individual teaching programs, provide more detailed frameworks to assist the delivery of a school's teaching program.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R12:** That, using the Stage Outcomes for the K-6 English and K-6 Mathematics Syllabuses, *Program Frameworks* be prepared, incorporating the mandatory outcomes for each Stage into a possible total teaching program that is manageable and directed at promoting productive learning opportunities for all students.

**R13:** That, to ensure cohesiveness and consistency, an overall coordination group of experienced teachers, working with curriculum experts, be responsible for developing an overarching framework and then to work with sub-groups preparing the *English K-6* and *Mathematics K-6 Program Frameworks*.

**R14:** That, while the *Program Frameworks* should provide a coherent work program K-6 with appropriate guidance for each Stage, it will be left to schools to prepare the detailed program for each of the years encompassed within a Stage.

It need not be mandatory for schools to implement the *Program Frameworks* but it can be confidently expected many will choose to do so, especially if the Frameworks are presented in such a way as not to be a strait-jacket for schools.

There remains the problem of what to do about the remaining Key Learning Areas apart from English and Mathematics K-6. It is true that schools repeatedly talked of paying much less attention to the outcomes in these four areas and, when they did, talked about integrating them in some way.

There are two straightforward ways in which the problem can be addressed:

**R15:** That when the Mathematics and English *Program Frameworks* are developed there be appropriate integration of mandatory outcomes from across all Key Learning Areas;

**R16:** That when the Integrated *Program Frameworks*, as described, have been completed, there be a review of what needs to be done in the Key Learning Areas other than English and Mathematics with a view to defining what might be presented in an integrated but limited program in each area throughout the Stages.

An essential element in the development of *Program Frameworks* will be the involvement of highly competent teacher-writers—well skilled in schools, willing to work with schools as materials are written, and able to use interactive websites as materials are written and samples produced. The writing teams would also have in their membership teachers well able to address equity issues and would see to it that the *Program Frameworks* prepared provide advice on how to cater for both very able and less able learners. Most importantly the writers of *Program Frameworks* should assist the NSW Department of Education and Training to develop:

- clear guidelines on how the Frameworks can be used, including advice on good pedagogical practice; and,
- an implementation program for their presentation to schools.

There remains the question of what to do about syllabuses for Years 7-10. The Evaluation suggests that, at this time, there is less of a need for *Program Frameworks* (as Heads of Department assist teachers to deal with programming in secondary schools).

The Evaluation feels very strongly that the combined measures of reducing the number of mandatory outcomes to be addressed (and reported on) and of developing *Program Frameworks* would go a long way to resolving difficulties teachers are having with curriculum demands. It is to be hoped that preliminary work can be undertaken as a matter of urgency to consider the proposals and initiate appropriate action. This preliminary work should also take into account advice provided during discussions with the Australian Council for Educational Research. First, that if we wish “to decrease teacher workload, it needs to be understood that there needs to be detail in the teaching framework but the reporting framework must be simple” (The matter of Assessment and Reporting Frameworks is taken up below.) Second, in designing program frameworks, it is necessary to think not just about content, but also about what is to be achieved and at what level. The process for “developing criteria for achievement can be either top-down where experts set the level (as for example in the UK), or bottom-up, which is derived from empirical data (such as Basic Skill Tests scores). ACER believes the best way is somewhere in the middle, a combination both of what experts think and how students perform”. These detailed comments have been included as they reinforce the need for an integrated effort to be made when *Program Frameworks* are being developed, resulting in coherent advice to schools thereby overcoming the present fragmentation of the curriculum complained of by teachers.

### 5.2.3 Building effective assessment and reporting strategies

While much of the pressure on schools arises from what are seen to be excessive demands coming from an over-abundance of outcomes to be addressed, the Evaluation has shown beyond any shadow of doubt that it is the demands created by assessment and reporting processes that are giving schools the most cause for concern. While both the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Board of Studies NSW have produced helpful guidelines to assist with assessment (as a result of recommendations in the 1995 Report *Focusing on Learning*, especially Recommendation 13), such guidelines are no more than that.

It is still left to schools to go through what for many has been a painful process of devising their own assessment programs and schedules of reporting. There is no doubt this has been time-consuming and for many a very frustrating exercise. The prospect of further demands from a Standards Framework with differing levels on which to report at various Stages, as proposed in the Board of Studies NSW *Description of Levels of Achievement: Consultative Model*, has had the effect in some places of creating even greater concern about the capacity of schools to cope.

Is there another way? How can schools be given greater assistance to manage what is inevitably a very complex part of their responsibilities. If we want to have faith in the processes schools follow, and in the results of their efforts to be better skilled in evaluating the performance of their students, we need to provide more constructive and more detailed advice which will enable them to implement effective programs. Such a change would assist schools to focus a little less on continuous planning efforts to devise programs, and somewhat more on implementing assessment programs which will help students to understand how well they are achieving, and will allow teachers and parents to see how they can positively assist the learning of their children. The Recommendations which follow are offered in this spirit.



### 5.2.3.1 Overcoming Assessment Overkill: *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks*

It has already been argued in relation to the proposal that *Program Frameworks* be developed that perhaps the time has come to change our attitudes to just what should be prepared for schools to assist them to develop learning programs. The same argument can be put in relation to assessment and reporting. Again, the intention is not to place unnecessary constraints on all schools. That would be counter-productive and would not respect the high levels of professionalism which exist in our schools. On the other hand, a better balance needs to be struck so that schools are better assisted with local decision-making with reasonably defined parameters which have been produced centrally.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R17:** That, linked to the development of *Program Frameworks*, *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* be written by experienced teachers and other experts, with appropriate community consultation, using as a basis the content being incorporated in the *K-6 Program Frameworks* and *K-6 Integrated Program Frameworks*.

**R18:** That the *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* provide for each Stage within K-6

- principles of good assessment and reporting practices;
- detailed advice on assessment processes as they reflect best practice;
- advice on how to make best use of ongoing assessment and diagnostic information derived from State-wide testing programs;
- in particular, advice on how schools should report on progress being made by students with special needs;
- schedules for managing assessment across each school year;
- advice on reporting to parents, the nature of the information to be provided, the managing of direct communications with parents; and,
- detailed guidance on how to track student progress in an efficient way.

**R19:** That, as a critical component of the *K-6 Assessment and Reporting Frameworks*, there should be included various best practice examples of process and product either drawn from schools or written for and extensively trialed in schools across Stages 1-3.

While it has been suggested that for Years 7-10 there appeared to be no need for the establishment of teams to prepare *Program Frameworks*, this is not seen to be the case for Assessment and Reporting. The Evaluation has shown that, while secondary schools are, by and large, on top of assessment demands in Years 11 and 12 (albeit with some pressures from content demands in some Syllabuses, at least), how to manage in the rest of the school is somewhat more problematic.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R20:** That subject-related *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* be developed for Stages 4 and 5 Syllabuses, noting the need to ensure that those responsible for developing such Frameworks take into account assessment and reporting requirements as they impact on the school overall.

While recommendations on *Assessment and Reporting* have been put forward separately from those relating to *Program Frameworks*, work undertaken on each should be closely coordinated and linked. As well, due regard needs to be given to how teaching and learning, and assessment and recording are vital parts of whole-school policies.



The Evaluation recommends:

**R21:** That when *Frameworks* are produced for *Primary (K-6)* and *Secondary (7-10)*, as proposed, such documents should provide advice on how each of the Stage-related *Program Frameworks* and *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* should relate to whole-school policies (in such areas as student welfare, the teaching of students with special needs, English as a Second Language, Aboriginal education).

As with the proposed *Program Frameworks*, those given the task of developing and trialling *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* should be asked to develop clear guidelines on how the Frameworks can be used, and should prepare an implementation program to assist their presentation to teachers in schools and to community groups. This reinforces the need to involve community groups in their preparation through a variety of consultation processes.

It should be stated that consideration was given to making available work samples drawn from schools to assist with improving current practices. Such a solution is seen as only a partial answer.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R22:** That an interactive website be established immediately to support the work of the writing teams. On this site should be placed examples of current best practice materials as they are developed for the *Frameworks* and proposed advice designed to assist schools, with the invitation to schools to comment on what is being prepared. This form of consultation will be vital to the project. The writing teams will need to monitor whatever goes on to that site to ensure quality and best practice examples.

In conjunction with the above, and to promote discussion of what constitutes effective assessment, the Evaluation recommends:

**R23:** That the NSW Department of Education and Training establish an interactive website that operates as a resource bank for examples of school-based documents, student work samples, successful school practices, and relevant associated items that demonstrate how outcomes assessment and reporting guidelines translate into practice across all Stages, K-10.

Some may see the proposals relating to the development of *Program Frameworks* and *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* as being overly ambitious. This is not the view of the Evaluation; we feel such a new direction designed to give schools more direct support, while not putting limitations on their professionalism, will be warmly welcomed by teachers.

It should be re-stated, however, that strong commitment to such a venture must come from all those responsible for curriculum and assessment, which means that the support of the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Board of Studies NSW will be vital. Again, if a start can be made quickly, it should be possible to provide schools with such support within a twelve-month time frame.

### 5.2.3.2 Bridging the gap: Reports and reporting

The Evaluation has shown that, while schools have worked really hard to involve their communities in agreed approaches to reporting on student progress and achievements, the ultimate outcome has often left teachers and parents disappointed. In interviews with parents at schools many expressed deep admiration for the way teachers worked hard to provide detailed reports and managed interviews. But they often went on to say they did not necessarily need all the information shown in individual sections of a school report – the final grade was what most wanted to read, along with an indication of where their daughter or son sat in relation to others. That is the nub of the reporting problem.

By and large, teachers on the other hand, have come to value an approach to assessment which concentrates on formative assessment but they, too, value what can be derived from other measures (eg standardized reading tests, or State-wide test results in literacy and numeracy) to provide an indication of the academic standing of cohorts of children passing through the school.

The Evaluation came to the view that what would help address this dilemma would be a system which would recognise the importance throughout a particular Stage of a blend of formative and summative assessment outcomes. It was noted earlier in this Report that, within each Stage, State-wide testing occurs in key areas of the curriculum and at such a time which allows schools to look closely at their results and adopt strategies which can help overcome perceived areas of weakness and build on strengths. This process would be greatly strengthened if the State-wide testing programs can focus on agreed mandatory outcomes as expressed in our syllabuses.

While more work will need to be done to address the problem of how best to achieve for each Stage K-6, a productive blend of formative and summative assessment strategies, acceptable to both teachers and parents, the Evaluation recommends:

**R24: That when *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* are being written, ways of reducing reporting demands be considered, especially the possible reduction for K-6 in the scope of school reporting for those years when State-wide results are available to parents.**

It is acknowledged that not all schools may be comfortable with this approach and some communities will want to insist on comprehensive reports each year. Nonetheless, the idea of a possible reduction in the scope of school reports in some years is seen as well worth exploring.

The Evaluation showed that schools had been provided with ‘key messages’ relating to assessment and reporting using an outcomes approach, with the advice that written reports be provided at least twice a year to keep parents informed of their children’s progress and educational needs, and that the reporting formats should be linked to good assessment practices which provide evidence in support of judgements.

Schools clearly had given a lot of thought to the style of these reports and what emphases should be placed on various aspects to be covered in the school report. How to link the release of the report to parent interviews has also been approached with great care by schools.

The Evaluation noted three major problems still of great concern to teachers:

- the language of the school report and whether parents are able to understand how well their children are doing especially if the report incorporates directly outcome statements as a basis for reports;
- the balance in focus in the school report; that is, what to do about reporting for all Key Learning Areas and how much comment should be incorporated on broader aspects of the child's progress and development (eg social skills);
- the scales or measures to be used for reporting.

This latter aspect remains highly problematic and there seemed to be considerable confusion. In many schools the approach has been to devise a Stage-related grid whereby student performance on an outcome (or a rewritten set of aggregated outcomes) is noted as

- working towards
- achieving
- working beyond

or some variation into a four-or five-point scale. Just what each level means is not always clear and, it was noted in some schools, the Stage-related nature of the assessment resulted in a reluctance for comments to be made about the extent to which students were “working beyond” the Stage, even when they had been undertaking extension work.

All of this suggests much work remains to be done to achieve better results in relation to reporting frameworks and standards by which performance can be reported. Schools still need much support as they relate their outcome-focused teaching to strengthened assessment and reporting approaches. As this work is undertaken it should not be forgotten that there resides in schools a huge body of knowledge amongst our teachers about what students at all levels can do and about what constitutes outstanding academic achievement (the “bottom-up” standards framework referred to by the ACER). Similarly, teachers know full well when a student needs help and how that help might be delivered.

The issue here is not that schools do not know what they are doing. It is rather, how can they best restructure their present efforts to take full advantage of a changed approach to curriculum delivery and related assessment and reporting processes. What is clear is that, without the involvement of teachers in the process of developing resource materials to assist in this transition process, as proposed through the development of *Frameworks*, we shall not draw as we should on the vast pool of professional experience available and the transition to a better style of operation will be greatly hindered.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R25:** That when *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* are being written, particular attention be given to

- the scope of the Reports to be provided to parents in each year within a Stage;
- the language used to describe areas of focus within a Report;
- the ways in which performance levels are defined; and,
- best practice procedures to be followed when portfolios are used as a part of school reporting procedures.

It is again emphasised that these are complex issues. For example, the question was often asked during the Evaluation: do we have to include the precise language of outcomes as expressed in syllabuses when we report to parents? Many schools were attempting to do this and then felt disillusioned because the parents could not comprehend what their child's progress was being reported on. The point to be emphasised here is that, now that the Evaluation has isolated significant various concerns, it is possible to demonstrate the inter-connectedness of the issues and arrive at a comprehensive solution. So, for example, just addressing the "standards of achievement" issue on its own is not seen as the best way to help schools at this time. An all-embracing strategy is needed which results in well-integrated, well-researched and tested advice in the form of flexible *Frameworks* going out to schools.

In the process of developing well-integrated, well-researched and tested advice much thought will need to be given to the nature of work samples or evidence to be provided to parents to assist them understand how well students are achieving. As the Evaluation showed, portfolios are very much seen in primary schools as a major component of assessment and reporting, with a great variety of formats. While they were generally seen as a positive way of assisting parents to understand what their children are doing, they were also seen in many cases as not being representative of the real progress being made by individual children. More thought needs to be given to what advice is needed on how to use portfolios to best advantage. If so much effort is put into their production we should fairly expect a better outcome.

#### 5.2.4 Tracking and retaining data on student progress

At the time of the 1995 Review, work was in train by the Department of Education to develop and trial the computer package *Kidmap*, which was designed to assist schools with the recording of data on student performance in relation to outcomes. It was noted in the submission to the present Evaluation made by the NSW Department of Education and Training that "the use by schools of technology in the assessment and reporting of outcomes has developed as an issue since 1996. Although the NSW Department of Education and Training developed *Kidmap* software for this purpose it was not mandatory. A number of problems in its implementation also meant many schools have looked for other solutions. Further, some schools have developed their own or have purchased commercially available software for recording and reporting purposes. The question of whether the Department should provide (and mandate) software for schools and the nature of what the software may look like, needs further consideration".

The Evaluation found the scene to be as the Department described it in its submission. Some schools have developed (often with parental help) their own systems and are happy with them. They incorporate limited outcomes for reporting and often include for each child other standardized testing results (eg reading). In the more developed systems, the results are kept for the whole school and are regularly updated. Very often the success of computer-based tracking depends on the skills and availability of a particular teacher or willing community member, and when the person with all the skills leaves problems arise. Examples exist where schools with particular knowledge and skills have further developed *Kidmap*.

As noted in the Evaluation, the School Transition Enterprise Management System software has been very helpful in managing data transmission when students in that District move from Year 6 to Secondary school.

What is needed is a detailed survey of what schools have developed and an analysis of the content and delivery of such programs. This will assist the NSW Department of Education and Training to see what have been the priorities as seen by schools in their development of data banks linked to the production of computer-based reports.

**R26: That the NSW Department of Education and Training undertake a comprehensive survey of computer-based tracking systems used by schools to monitor student academic progress with a view to developing a comprehensive tracking program able to be used by schools that is user-friendly and is transferable across schools and focus on areas seen as a priority by schools.**

In this process it will be important to find out what has been the experience of schools not just in the development of such programs but in sustaining them. A pooling of this information should enable clear directions to be set based on what, in some schools, has been considerable experience. We note as an aside, however, that considerable hostility to computer-generated school reports still exists amongst many parents. We note, too, that only gradually are teachers becoming more skilled in using IT for record keeping and reporting and, when they see only limited access to equipment, they feel reluctant about getting too enthusiastic about this inevitable development in schools.

### Digital portfolios

There is an emerging area of interest to the Evaluation but perhaps still a bit ahead of its time. The Evaluation was impressed by the potential of 'digital portfolios' for possibly shifting responsibility for the management of portfolios at least in part to students themselves. Such an approach would assist in changing pedagogy by asking students to take greater responsibility for managing their own learning. Digital portfolios are collections of work samples presented using ICT. Digital portfolios, when developed, should enhance and facilitate what is already happening in the classroom and not become an additional burden.

For the system to work, teachers and students will need to be competent in their word processing skills, multi-media page creation, *Powerpoint*, *Hyperstudio* and *Kidpix* programs, for example, as well as be able to use digital photography and video. Skills in this area, as in Internet usage, are becoming more commonly held by children of primary school age. As there are a number of impediments to this initiative (lack of teacher IT know-how, lack of access at home to computers able to perform CD ROM functions, etc) we suggest that digital portfolios could be the subject of further investigation and possibly a pilot study. If technology is the way of the future then we need to be exploring what lies ahead so that full advantage can be taken of new developments.

### Assisting transition

As pointed out above, the School Transitions Enterprise Management System software in the St George District is proving very helpful to the transfer of student data to secondary schools. This is a welcome move, as the Evaluation has shown that it is still the case in many places that secondary schools do not make great use of the rich data available from primary schools. Much is being done to assist the transition from primary to secondary school but it would seem further education is needed of some secondary schools to enable them to appreciate the significance of the considerable detailed data on student achievement available to them when students emerge from primary school.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R27: That when restructuring proceeds in the NSW Department of Education and Training, individual Regions determine how they will strengthen transition programs for students moving from primary to secondary schools and, in particular, how to assist secondary schools to make full use of student achievement data available from primary schools.**

## The Student Record Card

The review of computer-based tracking systems in schools and subsequent decisions concerning what programs are developed to assist the tracking of student progress should also result in a review of the status of the Student Record Card. It is very much out of date and a decision needs to be made concerning its future.

The Evaluation recommends:

**R28: That, as part of the review of computer-based tracking systems used by schools, an examination be made of the purpose and usefulness of the current Student Record Card so that decisions about its future use can be made.**

### 5.2.5 Supporting teachers

It has been noted in the introductory comments included in this section of the Report that the proposed restructuring of the NSW Department of Education and Training as set out in *Lifelong Learning: The Future of Public Education in NSW* offers greatly enhanced opportunities for strengthening the support able to be offered to schools, particularly in the area of curriculum. The Evaluation strongly supports these changes and fervently hopes that schools will see greater opportunities for involvement in intra- and inter-school discussions on matters relating to curriculum, assessment and reporting. Such opportunities will be extremely beneficial to the achievements of our students as teachers are able to offer quality programs enriched by helpful and supportive advice provided in a professional way by their colleagues and other experts.

This Evaluation has stressed the need to allow teachers to become involved in materials development and in the interchange, including on-line, of ideas. By identifying key teachers in Regions, by putting them in leadership roles and by maximising opportunities for schools to interact with one another and with those with acknowledged curriculum and measurement expertise we shall take great steps forward. This restructuring is an opportunity we should not miss.

While not wishing to pre-judge the content of new professional development opportunities to be undertaken with and by teachers, undoubtedly, a major professional element will relate to student assessment. It is the case that teachers still experience problems with how to judge student achievement and how to be consistent with others required to make similar judgements about their students. Much productive discussion will flow from providing teachers with opportunities to consider varieties of samples in a variety of contexts.

The proposed Teaching / Learning Exchange will be a valuable step forward but face-to-face discussions as part of professional development programs will be essential. A valuable foundation for such work will be the programs already developed by the Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate in the area of Consistent Teacher Judgement. Valuable assistance, too, could be provided by groups such as the Australian Council for Educational Research who have had vast experience across the country in working with schools to develop their capacity in making valid and consistent judgements on student achievement.

Recommendations in relation to professional development have already been made (see R10, R11 and comments following R16 and R21).

Similarly, attention has been drawn throughout this Report to the importance of promoting discussion of what constitutes good pedagogical practice. The recent work by the NSW Department of Education and Training in commissioning the development of the Discussion Paper on productive pedagogy *Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools* and related support materials (May 2003) is appreciated by the Evaluation as a timely move.



The Evaluation recommends:

**R29:** That steps be taken to ensure that activities relating to promoting good pedagogical practices encompassed in the *Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools* be firmly linked to professional development for teachers, focused on curriculum, assessment and reporting.

## 5.2.6 The teaching profession

### Beginning Teachers and Pre-service Teacher Education

In the 1995 Report *Focusing on Learning* critical comment was made that beginning teachers who participated in that Review complained of inadequate preparation in their introduction to current syllabuses and how to work with them.

Comments heard on visits to schools as part of the present Evaluation have been less critical. Indeed, in many instances it was the younger teachers who were seen as managing a little more easily the transition to teaching and assessing using outcomes. It is true they commented on workload pressures as beginning teachers but their preparation appeared to have led to their feeling comfortable with fitting in with an “outcomes-based approach” to teaching. This was a very pleasing aspect of the Evaluation.

### The NSW Institute of Teachers

In 2002, the Minister for Education and Training announced the formation of an Interim Committee for a NSW Institute of Teachers which was to establish a framework of professional standards to help guide teachers’ professional development at all Stages of their career, consult on the establishment of a permanent Institute of Teachers, and develop accreditation processes to recognise teacher excellence. The Committee’s work was seen to be the start of a major program to improve the quality and status of New South Wales’ teachers. Key areas for which the Interim Committee was asked to develop standards were ‘knowledge and understanding of course content’ and ‘student assessment’. This initiative was seen as responding not only to an earlier Review of Teacher Education (Ramsey 2000), but also to concerns raised in the First Report of the Vinson Inquiry into Public Education. The Interim Committee was asked to report to the Minister by 30 June 2003 (<http://www.icit.nsw.edu.au>).

Draft teaching standards for all NSW schools, were released in May 2003 by the Minister for Education and Training, including mandatory benchmarks for new teachers to meet before they begin their classroom career. The draft standards set out for the first time in NSW ‘elements of teaching’ required in the professional, in order to shape university preparation for the classroom. Element 3 is “Teachers plan, assess and report for effective learning” and 3.1.6 asks that a graduate teacher “demonstrate knowledge of the link between outcomes and assessment in the selection of assessment strategies”. As a teacher progresses through levels of professional competence, the standard for this skill is raised until, as a professional leader, a teacher can “manage the evaluation of assessment policies and strategies to ensure consistency across the school...”. This draft standard is an important first step in identifying what it is in teachers’ work that relates to assessment and reporting as part of a teacher’s competence in discipline knowledge, syllabus content, curriculum development and classroom programming. Being able to integrate these components skilfully, then transform them into relevant and meaningful reports to parents and their children, is a competency addressed in draft element 3.1.9.



The NSW Interim Committee was asked to progress its work in relation to national developments on teaching standards and accreditation, including the work of the national taskforce on teacher quality and educational leadership guided by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. In July 2003, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, announced an initial grant of \$10 million to establish a National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership, to be based in Canberra.

It is obvious that there is now a new impetus for defining more precisely standards for the teaching profession, with a strong emphasis on curriculum concerns and the link between teaching, learning, outcomes and assessment. The findings and recommendations of this Evaluation will have implications well beyond the New South Wales context.

## Concluding comment

For ease of reference, the twenty-nine Recommendations put forward in this Section of the Report have been reproduced as a coherent set in the following pages. A careful reading will lead to the conclusion that the Evaluation is not recommending that the present approach of using outcomes as a basis for curriculum development, assessment and reporting be abandoned. It is of the view, however, that current policy statements are inadequately defined and, as a result, confusion exists amongst those required to respond. What is equally obvious is that much remains to be done to give teachers and schools greater confidence in what they are doing and to assist them on their way as they pursue best practice strategies.

At various times the Evaluation was aware of a hinted-at-view that New South Wales may no longer be leading the way in curriculum, that it had gone too far along a “standards framework track”, making even greater demands on teachers. The Evaluation does not share this view though, early on, the impression was gained that it will be important in future work to arrive at a better blending in the advice offered to schools on curriculum, assessment and good pedagogical practice. The needle may have swung a little too far in one direction putting perhaps too heavy an emphasis on assessment and reporting.

Given the progress being made, we can be confident that schools will respond if they are asked to be part of the solution to the problems which have been identified. We trust that the Recommendations made in this Report will be helpful in the process. They are based on a detailed understanding of what schools have been doing. They build on sound advice from skilled practitioners and experts in their fields of curriculum and assessment. We believe we can be optimistic about the prospects for success.

## 6. Summary of recommendations

The summary of Recommendations which follow are grouped around five major themes:

- Adjusting curriculum demands
- Assisting schools
- Building effective assessment and reporting strategies
- Tracking and retaining data on student progress
- Supporting teachers.

### Adjusting curriculum demands

The Evaluation strongly recommends:

- R1: That the Minister for Education and Training be asked to review ways in which better linkage and greater cohesion can be brought about in the activities of the Office of the Board of Studies NSW and the NSW Department of Education and Training so that schools receive consistent curriculum advice, implementable syllabuses, and timely support for implementation as new documents are produced.
- R2: That a review be undertaken of all K-6 syllabuses, with strong input from teachers in schools, to determine what outcomes should be defined as mandatory for teaching, assessing and reporting purposes, with an emphasis on making teaching across all Key Learning Areas manageable.
- R3: That primacy be given to literacy and numeracy when defining the number of mandatory outcomes (i.e. that pride of place at each Stage be given to these two areas);
- R4: That for the remaining Key Learning Areas the number of mandatory outcomes should allow for meaningful engagement by students with the curriculum, thereby enabling “deeper learning” to occur, and ensure students overall enjoy a well-balanced K-6 learning program which prepares them for secondary school.
- R5: The approach to defining manageable mandatory outcomes in K-6 syllabuses should be followed when secondary syllabuses are developed.
- R6: That, where possible, the language in which mandatory outcomes are expressed be reviewed, to make their intent clear and enhance their prospects of being achieved, and to assist parents to understand them.
- R7: That the defining of the mandatory outcomes in syllabuses should in no way be seen as putting restrictions on teachers seeking to achieve more with their classes through the pursuit of additional outcomes and enriched learning opportunities.
- R8: That cooperation in attempts to arrive at national consistency in curriculum should not result in teachers in NSW schools having imposed upon them new syllabuses which do not link with those followed at present or result in a whole new set of outcomes injected into current documents impeding the preparation of soundly-based implementation and support programs.

## Assisting schools

The recommendations set out above can be seen as *enabling recommendations*. But there are other steps which can assist. The Evaluation recommends:

- R9: That steps be taken to bring together those directly responsible for preparing syllabuses (or revisions) and those with direct responsibility for assisting implementation, resulting in unambiguous, consistent and informative advice and support they give to schools.
- R10: That as part of its re-structuring program, the NSW Department of Education and Training develop a clear blue-print for the operations of its new curriculum officers at Regional and central levels so that maximum support is given to schools as they seek to implement syllabuses and associated assessment and reporting programs.
- R11: That when guidelines are developed for the support of curriculum and professional development programs for teachers, particular focus be given to ways in which schools in individual Regions can be brought together to build on shared experiences, with the identification of key staff in those schools who might play a vital Regional role.
- R12: That, using the Stage Outcomes for the K-6 English and K-6 Mathematics Syllabuses, *Program Frameworks* be prepared, incorporating the mandatory outcomes for each Stage into a possible total teaching program that is manageable and directed at promoting productive learning opportunities for all students.
- R13: That, to ensure cohesiveness and consistency, an overall coordination group of experienced teachers, working with curriculum experts, be responsible for developing an overarching framework and then to work with sub-groups preparing the *English K-6* and *Mathematics K-6 Program Frameworks*.
- R14: That, while the *Program Frameworks* should provide a coherent work program K-6 with appropriate guidance for each Stage, it will be left to schools to prepare the detailed program for each of the years encompassed within a Stage.
- R15: That when the Mathematics and English *Program Frameworks* are developed there be appropriate integration of mandatory outcomes from across all Key Learning Areas;
- R16: That when the Integrated *Program Frameworks*, as described, have been completed, there be a review of what needs to be done in the Key Learning Areas other than English and Mathematics with a view to defining what might be presented in an integrated but limited program in each area throughout the Stages.

## Building effective assessment and reporting strategies

- R17: That, linked to the development of *Program Frameworks*, *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* be written by experienced teachers and other experts, with appropriate community consultation, using as a basis the content being incorporated in the *K-6 Program Frameworks* and *K-6 Integrated Program Frameworks*.

R18: That the *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* provide for each Stage within K-6

- principles of good assessment and reporting practices;
- detailed advice on assessment processes as they reflect best practice;
- advice on how to make best use of ongoing assessment and diagnostic information derived from State-wide testing programs;
- in particular, advise on how schools should report on progress being made by students with special needs;
- schedules for managing assessment across each school year;
- advice on reporting to parents, the nature of the information to be provided, the managing of direct communications with parents; and,
- detailed guidance on how to track student progress in an efficient way.

R19: That, as a critical component of the K-6 *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks*, there should be included various best practice examples of process and product either drawn from schools or written for and extensively trialled in schools across Stages 1-3.

R20: That subject-related *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* be developed for Stages 4 and 5 Syllabuses, noting the need to ensure that those responsible for developing such Frameworks take into account assessment and reporting requirements as they impact on the school overall.

R21: That when *Frameworks* are produced for *Primary (K-6)* and *Secondary (7-10)*, as proposed, such documents should provide advice on how each of the Stage-related *Program Frameworks* and *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* should relate to whole-school policies (in such areas as student welfare, the teaching of students with special needs, English as a second language, Aboriginal education).

R22: That an interactive website be established immediately to support the work of the writing teams. On this site should be placed examples of current best practice materials as they are developed for the *Frameworks* and proposed advice designed to assist schools, with the invitation to schools to comment on what is being prepared. This form of consultation will be vital to the project. The writing teams will need to monitor whatever goes on to that site to ensure quality and best practice examples.

In conjunction with the above, and to promote discussion of what constitutes effective assessment, the Evaluation recommends:

R23: That the NSW Department of Education and Training establish an interactive website that operates as a resource bank for examples of school-based documents, student work samples, successful school practices, and relevant associated items that demonstrate how outcomes assessment and reporting guidelines translate into practice across all Stages, K-10.

R24: That when *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* are being written, ways of reducing reporting demands be considered, especially the possible reduction for K-6 in the scope of school reporting for those years when State-wide results are available to parents.

- R25: That when *Assessment and Reporting Frameworks* are being written, particular attention be given to
- the scope of the Reports to be provided to parents in each year within a Stage;
  - the language used to describe areas of focus within a Report;
  - the ways in which performance levels are defined; and,
  - best practice procedures to be followed when portfolios are used as a part of school reporting procedures.

## Tracking and retaining data on student progress

- R26: That the NSW Department of Education and Training undertake a comprehensive survey of computer-based tracking systems used by schools to monitor student academic progress with a view to developing a comprehensive tracking program able to be used by schools that is user-friendly is transferable across schools and focus on areas seen as a priority by schools.
- R27: That when restructuring proceeds in the NSW Department of Education and Training, individual Regions examine the question of what needs to be done to strengthen transition programs for students moving from primary to secondary schools and, in particular, how to assist secondary schools to make full use of student achievement data available from primary schools.
- R28: That, as part of the review of computer-based tracking systems used by schools, an examination be made of the purpose and usefulness of the current Student Record Card so that decisions about its future use can be made.

## Supporting teachers

Recommendations in relation to professional development have already been made (see R10, R11 and comments following R16 and R21 in Section 5). In addition, the Evaluation recommends:

- R29: That steps be taken to ensure that activities relating to promoting good pedagogical practices encompassed in the *Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools* be firmly linked to professional development for teachers, focused on curriculum, assessment and reporting.

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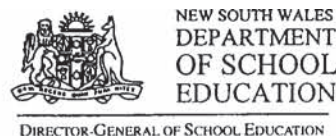
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# Appendix 1



## MEMORANDUM TO PRINCIPALS

### ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING IN NSW GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

The document, *Principles for assessment and reporting in NSW government schools* is provided to assist schools in reviewing their assessment and reporting policies. It is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that the review is undertaken in consultation with the parent community and that school practices in assessment and reporting reflect the principles outlined in this document.

I recognise that schools are at many different points in the development of their reporting practices following the Eltis review, *Focusing on Learning*. There is scope for variation in the style and format of reporting, provided that the reports clearly convey what the student knows and can do and how that compares with the standard expected by the syllabus. Comparing student performance with a class or grade cohort is of limited value unless the basis for judging that performance is clearly articulated.

Current practice is that parents are kept informed of the progress and educational needs of their children by means of appropriate written reports. This is an important provision and should be maintained at least twice per year. It may be linked to portfolio reporting and a range of other excellent reporting practices involving interaction between teacher, student and parent.

The document has been provided in sufficient numbers for each member of the teaching staff. Copies have also been forwarded to the relevant parent body and school council where appropriate. The development of your school's assessment and reporting policy should be undertaken with the full and informed involvement of the school community.

Further support material will be provided to schools this year including examples from primary and secondary contexts of classroom strategies for assessment and reporting. For information please contact David Cullen on (02) 808 9574

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ken Boston'.

Ken Boston  
**DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOL EDUCATION**  
6 August 1996



## Appendix 2

### MEMORANDUM TO:

### ALL PRINCIPALS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

DN/03/00072

### EVALUATION OF SCHOOL BASED ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Professor Ken Eltis and Associate Professor Stephen Crump, both from the University of Sydney, have been appointed to undertake an evaluation study of school based assessing and reporting practices in NSW public schools. This study will be undertaken in Terms 1 and 2, 2003.

In addition to clarifying and restating the educational value of an outcomes approach to improving teaching and learning, the evaluation study will:

- assess the impact different approaches to assessing, recording and reporting have had on the workload of primary teachers
- the extent to which such approaches acknowledge the primacy of teachers' professional judgment
- identify features and characteristics of best practice models
- assess the clarity and usefulness of various models of reporting to parents
- provide advice about the nature of support required to promote best practice within the context of a manageable workload, and
- provide advice on the implications for school based assessment, recording and reporting in Years 7 to 10.

A reference group has been established to assist Professor Eltis during the evaluation. This reference group, which is chaired by the Executive Director of Early Childhood, Primary and Rural Education, includes representatives from the NSW Teachers Federation, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association of NSW, the Office of the Board of Studies, the Primary Principals' Association, and the Secondary Principals' Council.

The evaluation study will draw on a number of sources including information obtained from a sample of schools, a review of approaches in other states and countries, and written responses from schools, organisations and individuals. A website will also be established during the evaluation so that schools and individual teachers and parents can respond to specific questions and submit material they consider relevant to the evaluation.

*Appendix 2 continued...*

More specific information about the ways in which schools and individuals can contribute to the evaluation study will be provided during Term 1. If you have any queries about the evaluation, please contact Gavin Patterson on telephone number 9561 8304 or by email [Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au)

Mr Patterson has been deployed from his position as Principal, Carlton Public School to work with Professor Eltis and Associate Professor Crump on the evaluation.

(Dr) Alan Laughlin  
**Deputy Director-General (Schools)**  
19 February 2003

## Appendix 3

**MEMORANDUM TO:**

**ALL PRINCIPALS AND SUPERINTENDENTS**

**DN/03/00102**

### **OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING EVALUATION**

On 19 February 2003 I informed all principals and district superintendents of an independent evaluation of school-based assessment and reporting being undertaken by Professor Ken Eltis and Associate Professor Stephen Crump, both from the University of Sydney.

Professor Eltis has now asked that schools be advised of progress to date with the evaluation study and invited to participate in the consultation process. How such participation can occur is explained in the attached letter from Professor Eltis.

I urge schools to respond to the invitation to contribute to this important evaluation.

(Dr) Alan Laughlin  
**Deputy Director-General (Schools)**  
March 2003



*Appendix 3 continued...***OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING EVALUATION**

As you know, I have been appointed to undertake an evaluation study of school based outcomes assessment and reporting practices in NSW public schools and will be assisted in this work by Associate Professor Stephen Crump. This study will be undertaken in Terms 1 and 2, 2003.

The evaluation study will draw on a number of sources including information obtained from a sample of schools, a review of approaches in other states and countries, and written responses from schools, organisations and individuals. As part of the evaluation, members of the team will visit a range of schools throughout the State.

We believe it is essential that we hear the views of teachers in schools so that we learn at first hand of their experiences of assessing and reporting using outcomes since the Report “Focusing on Learning” (1995). We plan to speak to the following groups:

- Principals and school executives
- Students
- Classroom teachers
- School community members

The Evaluation Team has considered areas where it would appreciate advice and input from all schools including those involved in the site visits. These areas are set out in a series of questions that can be answered by accessing the “Public Review and Inquiries” section of the DET homepage, [www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au) that is being established for the duration of the evaluation.

This strategy has been chosen for communicating broadly with schools and others interested in public education in NSW. The team is anxious to hear any views schools and the community have on the nature and content of materials forwarded to them, and on the implementation processes followed, since the introduction of assessment and reporting using outcomes in 1995 and later.

We are also keen to see school-developed materials, including work programs, assessment and reporting documentation which schools may have devised reflecting new approaches. If schools wish to provide copies of materials, we should be very pleased to receive them, and may use them to build up a set of best practice models.

I would like to thank you for your interest in the work of the Outcomes Assessment and Reporting Evaluation. If you have any queries about the Evaluation, please contact Gavin Patterson, Senior Project Officer, on telephone number 95618304 or by email [Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au)

Professor Ken Eltis  
University of Sydney



## Appendix 4

### MEMORANDUM TO: ALL PRINCIPALS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

DN/03/00145

The Outcomes Assessment and Reporting evaluation is underway in NSW Public Schools. I would urge all schools and their communities to take the opportunity to provide information for consideration by Professor Eltis and the evaluation team.

(Dr) Alan Laughlin  
Deputy Director-General (Schools)  
March 2003

#### EVALUATION OF SCHOOL BASED ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING.

I have now commenced visiting a selected number schools across NSW as well as collecting information from the website survey and various educational authorities. The evaluation team is anxious to hear any views schools and the community have on the nature and content of syllabus and support materials forwarded to them by the Department of Education and Board of Studies, and on the implementation processes followed, since the introduction of assessment and reporting using outcomes in 1995 and later.

The Evaluation Team has considered areas where it would appreciate advice and input from all schools including those involved in the site visits. These areas are set out in a series of questions that can be answered using an on-line survey by accessing the Public Review and Inquiries section of the DET homepage, [www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au) that has been established for the duration of the evaluation. If answering these questions on-line is inconvenient, responses can be emailed or posted to:

Gavin Patterson Early Childhood, Primary and Rural Education, Level 35 Bridge Street  
Sydney NSW 2000 [Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au)

We are also keen to see school-developed materials, including work programs, assessment and reporting documentation which schools may have devised reflecting new approaches. If schools wish to provide copies of materials, we should be very pleased to receive them, and may use them to build up a set of best practice models. **The closing date for submissions is 12 May 2003.** These submissions should be also forwarded to Gavin Patterson. (see above for contact details).

I would like to thank you for your interest in the work of the Outcomes and Assessment Reporting Evaluation. If you have any queries about the evaluation, please contact Gavin Patterson, Senior Project Officer, on telephone number 9561 8304.

Ken Eltis

# Appendix 5

## Submissions to Outcomes Assessment and Reporting Evaluation

### School

Abbotsford Public School	School visits—materials handed to us	Multicultural Programs Unit
Ardlethan Central School	Lithgow Public	St George District Office
Beverly Hills Primary School	Kandos Public	
Croydon Public School	Modanville Public	
Denistone East Public School	Byron Bay Public	Dr David Cullen
Epping West Public School	Lane Cove Public	Mr Brendon Daley
Epping West Public School	Penrith High	Mr Ken Curran
Fairfield Primary School	Bligh Park Public	Mr Phillip Cooke
Fairy Meadow Demonstration School	Hay War Memorial High	Mr Ray Cavenagh
Forbes Public School	Moulamein Public	Mr Robert Landow
Fort Street High School	Ferncourt Public	Ms Beverley Milson
Gardeners Road Public School	Lidcombe Public	Ms Debbie Sutton
Glenmore Park High School	Yowie Bay Public	Ms Deborah O'Mar
Hallidays Point Public School	Engadine High School	Ms Linda Roberts
Hebersham Public School	Hebersham Public	Ms Sue Mootz
Illaroo Road Public School	Hassall Grove Public	
Kanwal Public School	Dapto Public	
Kensington Public School	Berkeley Public	
Kincumber Public School	Asquith Girls High	
Mona Vale Public School	Cowan Public	
Narrabeen Lakes Public School	Duval High School	
Tahmoor Public School	Caragabal Public	
Thirlmere Public School	Quandilla Central	
Thornton Public School	Cherrybrook Tech High	
	Glenmore Park High	
	Australia Association of Special Education (NSW Chapter)	
Bradfield College	Board of Studies NSW	
Griffith High School	Early Childhood Council	
Penrith High School	Federation of P&C Association NSW	
Strathfield Girls High School	NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group	
	NSW Department of Education and Training	
	NSW Federation of School Community Organisations	
	NSW Primary Principals' Association	
	NSW Secondary Principal's Council	
	NSW Teachers Federation	
	Professional Teachers Council of NSW	
	Public Schools Principal Forum	

# Appendix 6



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## PUBLIC REVIEWS AND INQUIRIES

### > External Evaluation of School Based Assessment and Reporting

Professor Ken Eltis and Associate Professor Stephen Crump from the University of Sydney have been appointed to undertake an evaluation study of school based assessing and reporting practices in NSW public schools. The study will be undertaken in Terms 1 and 2, 2003.

The evaluation study will draw on a number of sources including information obtained from a sample of schools, a review of approaches in other states and countries and written responses from schools, organisations and individuals.

You are invited through this Website to respond to a small number of questions on school based assessment and reporting. Your responses will be used to inform Professor Eltis' findings and recommendations.

- [Teacher Survey](#)
- [Principal Survey](#)
- [Parent Survey](#)

Thank you in advance for your support and cooperation.

## Contact

### [email link](#)

We also invite you to submit your contact details (optional) so the evaluation team can follow up your comments with more detailed interviews if necessary. Please feel free to attach to your survey responses any information or material that you find particularly relevant to the evaluation.



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# Appendix 7

## Data for 160 Principals Respondents

### Type of school

K-6	147
7-12	10
Central	3
Total	160

92% K-6 Schools  
6% 7-12 Schools  
2% Central Schools

### Location of teachers

City	73
Regional	21
Country	66
Total	160

46% City schools  
13% Regional e.g. Newcastle, Wollongong  
41% Country

### Gender of teachers

Female	87
Male	73
Total	160

54% Female teachers  
46% Male teachers

### Years of employment

4 to 10 Years	1
11 to 20 Years	17
More than 20 Years	142
Total	160

Appendix 7 continued...

## Data for 49 Parents Respondents

### Type of school

K-6	31
7-12	13
Central	4
College	1
Total	49

63% K-6 Schools  
 27% 7-12 Schools  
 8% Central  
 2% College

### Location of parents

City	16
Regional	10
Country	23
Total	49

32% City schools  
 20% Regional e.g. Newcastle, Wollongong  
 48.9% Country

### Gender of parents

Female	32
Male	17
Total	49

65% Female parents  
 35% Male parents

### Years stages of schooling children were in

Early Stage 1	4
Stage 1	6
Stage 2	10
Stage 3	12
Stage 4	5
Stage 5	5
Stage 6	7
Total	49

Appendix 7 continued...

## Data for 145 Teacher Respondents

### Type of school teachers were from

K-6	97	67%	K-6 Schools
7-12	45	31%	7-12 Schools
Central	3	2%	Central
Total	145		

### Type of employment

Full Time	139	95%	Full Time employment
Part time	4	2.7%	Part Time employment
Casual	2	1.3%	Casual employment
Total	145		

### Location of teachers

City	69	47.5%	City schools
Regional	14	9.7%	Regional e.g. Newcastle, Wollongong
Country	62	42.8%	Country
Total	145		

### Gender of teachers

Female	103	71%	Female teachers
Male	42	29%	Male Teachers
Total	145		

### Years of employment

1 to 3 Years	5	3.4%	1 to 3 Years
4 to 10 Years	8	5.5%	4 to 10 Years
11 to 20 Years	59	40.6%	11 to 20 Years
More than 20 Years	73	50.3%	20 Years and over
Total	145		



## Appendix 8



### NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION

TEACHERS FEDERATION HOUSE 23-33 MARY STREET SURRY HILLS NSW 2010

Please address all correspondence to  
THE GENERAL SECRETARY

The information contained in this facsimile is intended for the named recipients only. It may contain privileged and/or confidential information and if you are not an intended recipient you must not use, disclose, copy or take any action in reliance on it. If you have received this facsimile in error please notify us immediately by a collect telephone call to: (02) 9 217 2100.

17 March 2003

To: **Federation Representatives and Principals Primary, Central and High Schools**  
(please bring this to the attention of all Federation members)

#### **RE: EVALUATION OF SCHOOL BASED ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING**

Dear Colleagues,

The purpose of this memo is to encourage schools collectively as well as individual teachers to have input into the current evaluation of school based assessment and reporting.

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, Alan Laughlin, Deputy Director General (Schools) sent a memorandum to all principals and superintendents (DN/03/00072) to inform them of an Evaluation of School Based Assessment and Reporting being undertaken by Professor Ken Eltis and Associate Professor Stephen Crump from the University of Sydney.

The conduct of this evaluation arises because the Federation raised with the Minister concerns about the workload implications of outcomes based assessment and consequential reporting of student achievement.

The Federation is represented on the Reference Group which provides advice on the conduct of the evaluation.

The evaluation team will be visiting some schools and is currently conducting an on-line survey.

All Federation members are encouraged to access and respond to this on-line survey. Go to the DET website at [www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au), then go to Public Reviews.

In addition, the evaluation team is calling for written submissions. These will close on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2003 and should be sent by email to [Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Gavin.Patterson@det.nsw.edu.au) or by hard copy to Gavin Patterson, Early Childhood, Primary and Rural Education, Level 14, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

Once again, all Federation members are urged to have input into this important evaluation.

Yours sincerely,

Barry Johnson  
General Secretary

## Appendix 9



### TO PRIMARY PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal

Last year the Board of Studies began a research project that focused on the use of the six primary syllabuses. This is a brief update on what has been undertaken so far and what is planned for this year.

Board of Studies Liaison Officers have visited over 100 schools across the state gathering information from teachers. Questionnaires have been returned from almost 400 teachers. Peak bodies including the Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations, the Professional Teaching Council, the Association of Special Education, the Catholic Education Commission, the Early Childhood Association, the NSW Teachers' Federation, the Federation of School Communities Organisation and the Primary Principals Association have presented perspectives on the nature of the Primary Curriculum. The Inspector, Primary Education, has also addressed Principals' conferences outlining details of the project and listening to comments and views held on primary curriculum matters.

Currently we are analysing this information in five broad areas:

- (i) How existing syllabuses and support documents are being used
- (ii) Specific comments about outcomes and indicators
- (iii) Comments about specific Key Learning Areas
- (iv) Comments about assessment and reporting
- (v) Future issues and recommendations


We will be sharing this information with each sector so that we can work together to formulate strategies to ensure that we assist primary teachers to best achieve teaching and learning goals for their students. Further updates on this project will be provided in a series of Board Bulletins during the year.

This is an important project and I appreciate your contribution in identifying key issues and working with the Board of Studies Liaison Officers.

I look forward to fostering the continuing cooperation that has developed between primary schools and the Board.

For further information please contact Margaret Malone, Inspector, Primary Education on (02) 9367 8199 or email [malone@boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au](mailto:malone@boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au).

Yours sincerely



Dr John Bennett  
General Manager

5/02/03