EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE

AN INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES
FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIANS OF ALL AGES

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 9 JULY 2012

SESSION TWO

Members

Dr J.M. Woollard (Chairman)
Mr P.B. Watson (Deputy Chairman)
Dr G.G. Jacobs
Ms L.L. Baker
Mr P. Abetz
_____

Hearing commenced at 10.53 am

HENDON, MS RIKKI
Branch Assistant Secretary, Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association of Western Australia, examined:

BOOTSMA, MS JOYCE MARIE
School Registrar and Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association of Western Australia representative, examined:

CLARKE, MR RUSSELL JAMES
ICT Officer, Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association of Western Australia, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I thank you for your interest and your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into improving educational outcomes for Western Australians of all ages. At this stage I would like to introduce myself, Janet Woollard, and other members of the committee Peter Abetz, Lisa Baker; and also our secretariat, Brian Gordon and Loraine Abernethie; and from Hansard we have Judith Baverstock.

The Education and Health Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure of Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house. As a public hearing, Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any document or documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed to the questions we have for you today, I need to ask have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIR: You are aware of our inquiry. Thank you for your earlier submission, which we used to ask some follow-up questions. I believe you were given a copy of those questions that we asked following up from that. This area is probably more difficult for the committee than a lot of other areas—maybe because of our ages!—and IT is growing so rapidly. We might give you an opportunity to discuss in general some of the questions we have sent to you. If those questions do not cover the strengths or the major weaknesses that you see in the current system maybe you can cover them in response to those questions and then go on and highlight what you see as the strengths and weaknesses. We might give you each 10 minutes, which will take us to 11.30 am and then we will ask questions, if that would be agreeable. Who would like to go first?

Ms Hendon: I am happy to go first. I will give you an overview of who we are and who we cover, and as our submission says some of the sticking points around ICT in our public school system. We are the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association of Western Australia. We represent support staff in WA's public schools. Those staff include business managers, registrars, school officers, library officers, laboratory technicians and ICT officers—by whichever name they have as that tends to vary with individual schools. We find our membership takes up a lot of workload in schools around ICT, so we feel we definitely have something to contribute in this forum. The major sticking point for us, which I think is clear from our submission, is the inadequacy of the current ICT resourcing in schools, especially in the area of maintenance and support. The real issue that we have identified is that the Department of Education does not allocate ICT officers to schools as part of the staffing formula for the schools, so schools must fund positions from their own budget or trade-in part of their teacher allocation for ICT officers. Some schools are more able to do that than others, depending on what they have to play with. Primary schools in particular tend not to have a lot to play with and for the most part they do not have ICT officers, although there may be some exceptions to the rule. Where they are employed, ICT officers are responsible for the set-up, maintenance and ongoing support of technology in the school. There are some specific tasks that they do. We have worked with ICT officers in our membership to develop this list. Where they are employed they are responsible for setting up computers and other devices; supporting staff and student computers; service support; maintenance and upgrades; other technologies, including interactive whiteboards, photocopiers, printers; access to interactive web-based programs; audio visual and video conferencing equipment; software equipment acquisition; planning technology upgrades; telephone system support; LED screens for the school signs that sit outside the school; back-end of school website support and front end as well, if the normal editor is absent—the normal editor tends to be a deputy, a teacher or a registrar for the most part. They are also responsible for dealing with mobile devices for both staff and students, and other duties as required. That is a quite a long list, and that is a fairly substantial workload we are looking at there, so there is quite a big body of work to be done in schools.

Mr P. ABETZ: Are mobile devices such things as iPads and laptops?

Ms Hendon: iPads, laptops and even smartphones; it is a range of different devices. As technology develops these are becoming more and more prevalent in schools.

The CHAIR: If I can ask you at this point, because you referred to the different responsibilities, in some other areas in relation to schools, that there is a formula; for example, with school health nurses the formula might be that for 200 students in a primary school there is 0. whatever FTE school health nurses and for so many students in high school it is 0. whatever FTE school health nurses. Have you worked out a formula? I do not believe it was in your previous submission and I do not believe I have seen that anywhere, but we would obviously like to see such a formula if one has been proposed.

Ms Hendon: Obviously we would like to work with the department to develop that formula, but at this point we have done a bit of work with our ICT officers. We got together a working party of ICT officers from a number of different schools which run different programs and have different services. We have a good range of backgrounds there. For the most part, they said that what would be best would be one ICT support officer per 200 computers.

The CHAIR: So 200 computers in the school? Is that just the desktop computers?

Ms Hendon: There are other devices in the school that they work with, but we thought that would probably be easiest as a basic formula, because there has never been any such formula before.

The CHAIR: Normally most classrooms have about six computers. That would mean you would not get an IT officer in a primary school.

Ms Hendon: That is an issue that we have identified.

The CHAIR: Sorry, are you saying one IT officer for 200 computers? That might be one IT officer for three schools.

Ms Hendon: That is correct. So under that formula, for most secondary schools there would be at least one or two ICT officers, if not more. But we have identified that primary schools with fewer than 200 computers would share an allocation with other local schools.

[11.00 am]

The CHAIR: Could we have the background paper you prepared in relation to that by way of supplementary information?

Ms Hendon: I am happy to forward that on to you—absolutely.

The CHAIR: Thank you. When you forward that on to us, maybe you could look at that because we will possibly then put that up as one of the submissions to the inquiry so you might want to tidy it up.

Ms Hendon: That is perfectly fine; we can do that.

The CHAIR: If it is a working copy.

Ms Hendon: No worries. We have thought about those ratios. That may require some further discussion, but that is based on the feedback —

The CHAIR: How far have you got in relation to those discussions with the education department?

Ms Hendon: In terms of implementing something, not particularly far. Joyce and Russell are probably better placed to give you the background on that because they have been around and having this discussion with the department for quite some time.

The CHAIR: That is fine. We will carry on with yours and then we will get to them.

Ms Hendon: Obviously, that is quite a significant workload for the current ICT officers, and that is something that is only going to increase. We have just had the digital education revolution, so there are a lot more computers in schools; there are a lot more devices in schools. As e-learning becomes more prevalent, the work for ICT officers is only going to increase. It begs the question for us: how is this work managed in schools without ICT officers? In schools without ICT officers, from the information we have gathered, the work just falls to other staff. Who that staff member is varies from school to school. We did a survey together with the department last year and we identified that, basically, anyone who works in a school can potentially be this person who takes on the load. It tends to be a teacher or a business manager or registrar for the most part. These are resources that meant for completely other functions so a lot of their time is being taken up by this ICT workload. Other than that it can be a school officer, a library officer, a private contractor, a principal or even a deputy principal. I think, anecdotally, we have heard an example of a gardener doing some basic assistance.

Mr P. ABETZ: That is my area!

Ms Hendon: I am not sure whether that was amusing or disturbing really.

Mr P. ABETZ: He enjoys it.

Ms Hendon: Yes; that is great! It just goes to show that there is a really ad hoc arrangement, and it is not necessarily someone with particular expertise in the area, so it may not be somebody who is able to do the job the way that it really needs to be done.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Hardly accountable under those circumstances.

Ms Hendon: No; it means there is a huge variation from school to school in what is provided as well in terms of support for teachers and students. That falls to other staff and, obviously, diverts resources away from other functions, including the delivery of education. In terms of other support, there is also the customer service centre help desk. That does provide a level of basic assistance, but

it does not really do everything it needs to do in terms of supporting schools without ICT officers. We have identified that it cannot remotely access the curriculum service for schools that have not transitioned to the SOE 4. Even with SOE 4—schools that have moved on to the standard operating environment—other servers that are not the main administration server and the curriculum server cannot be accessed. The library server, for example, cannot be accessed remotely for assistance. It is still very limited in that sense. One of the issues too is that it can deal only with software problems. You can go in and access the system and play with the software, but they can only really talk through hardware problems. Someone who is experiencing a hardware problem needs to be able to describe the problem in a level of detail. Depending on that person's understanding of technology, they may not be able to do that, and then they have to understand the instructions that come through from the other end. From the consultations we have had with our members, that can be a very time-consuming process. Basically, it means there are delays in actually resolving issues, and it is not done very effectively. In some cases the issue cannot be resolved that way at all. In some instances, where there is no support, contractors can be brought in to do some of the more complex work, but this tends to be quite expensive and it takes a lot of time to get those issues resolved that way. It is especially a problem for regional schools. Regional schools have to pay for not only the contractor the way metro areas would, but they tend to have to pay for travel and sometimes accommodation, and that is prohibitive in terms of the budget they have to play with. We have, again, anecdotal evidence that schools tend to basically gather a lot of problems before they engage someone. They wait until they have a substantial body of work to be done and then get somebody up. There may be a number of issues or computers that have broken down but they have to wait, otherwise it is not very cost effective. That is a little bit of a basic overview. I think Joyce will provide a few more examples and so is Russell. They might be able to tease that out further.

The CHAIR: Joyce, do you want to go next?

Ms Bootsma: All right, yes. As Rikki said, I would like to work more specifically. Obviously, as a registrar in a school I can talk from my experience in my school. I have been there for 10 years. My school is about 42 years old. There are problems with that, particularly with IT. Perhaps just going back; you asked a question about what kind of negotiations have been going on with regard to workload and ICT in schools. I want to touch on the fact that approximately three years ago we started working in the commission regarding workload and it was recognised in that commission —

The CHAIR: The commission?

Ms Hendon: The WA Industrial Relations Commission.

Ms Bootsma: The industrial commission, sorry—that there is a work load involved in the ICT area in schools. But over the past three years, with negotiations and discussions with the department, they have not been able to recognise how to gauge what that workload is for us. It is recognised there is a workload but the department cannot agree on a formula for how to address it and how much time et cetera needs to be given to us.

The CHAIR: My knowledge of the commission is pretty limited. You are here; the commission is here; department is here?

Ms Bootsma: Yes.

The CHAIR: You take it to the commission, then the commission takes it ahead or is it still the two of you?

Ms Bootsma: We were meeting in the commission.

The CHAIR: So they were the arbitrator?

Ms Bootsma: That is right. Because there were other issues for workload and it was decided in the commission to split the workload into ICT and other workload for the school support staff, it was agreed between the union and the department that we would take an extra six months to work out

how to identify the issues with the ICT and how the workload is impacting. We have been in those discussions for three years now and the department cannot agree on a formula or a way of recognising what the ICT problems are in the school.

The CHAIR: Can we as a committee—I will hand over to Lisa for a question for you—approach the person who has been mediating or arbitrating in the commission and ask them for a summary of discussions to date? Who is putting together, "This has been going on for so long and this is where they are at"? Are we able to ask the commission about that?

Ms Bootsma: I do not think the commission would have very much on file as far as the ICT part goes. You certainly probably could ask them. It was agreed that we would go away and discuss between the department and the union a way of identifying this. We have come up with surveys, and Rikki went through one of the surveys. However, even though that was in agreeance with the department; it was happy with the questions, the department still cannot decide how it can use that to show whether it is workload and how it can help schools.

The CHAIR: When are you taking it back to the commission?

Ms Bootsma: There is not a date at this point.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Has there been any research commissioned by an independent external party such as KPMG, Deloitte or someone to assess it? It is standard practice to assess job capacity and workload formula.

Ms Bootsma: My understanding is that at this point in time it has tried to be addressed through the department and the union.

Ms L.L. BAKER: There has been no external independent assessment?

Ms Bootsma: Not that I am aware of.

Ms Hendon: Not as far as we are aware.

Ms L.L. BAKER: In my view that would be a huge gap. Is that something you would like to comment on?

Ms Hendon: That is something we would have to explore with the department.

Ms Bootsma: I think some of the problems that are occurring are that when we first went to the commission, the people attending the commission meetings on behalf of the department have now changed or been promoted, so new people have come in and perhaps do not have a full understanding, so we feel like we are continually going around and around.

Ms L.L. BAKER: That strengthens the argument for an independent external assessment of the need to identify the position; the level of the position, classification, all that kind of stuff.

The CHAIR: Where has that been done previously, Lisa?

Ms L.L. BAKER: The whole public sector uses the BIPER system that classifies jobs and looks at workload. It is a highly complex and technical process. I would not recommend that the Public Service Commission get involved, but there are consultants who make a living out of doing that work.

The CHAIR: As a committee if we wanted to pursue that line and say that something like that had to happen, do we pursue it with the commission, the government or with whom?

Mr P. ABETZ: Just say it.

The CHAIR: No; we have to say we believe —

Mr P. ABETZ: There is obviously a problem.

The CHAIR: Do we say we believe the health department should or the productivity should be?

Mr P. ABETZ: Education department.

Ms L.L. BAKER: We are not into drafting now, but it would be something along the lines of a recommendation such as, "Given the time involved in coming to a decision and reporting back to the commission on this subject, this committee would like to see some work done by perhaps an external consultant employed specifically to assess the need".

Mr Clarke: The process has gone on for quite a long time. I cannot remember exactly what has gone on and what time period. At one point the department did release some workload surveys based here on ICT, but I think the scope was very limited. I think there were about 60 schools out of the entire system surveyed. I cannot even remember if that was —

Mr P. ABETZ: That was probably before iPads were invented.

The CHAIR: We might come back to you, Joyce.

Ms Bootsma: There have been a couple of independent surveys on workload that included some of the ICT, but it was workload and work value so, although ICT was identified, it has not specifically been just on ICT.

The CHAIR: Rikki, you have already said you would provide us with some information. When you provide us with that information, if a workload productivity assessment has been done of IT requirements in the other states, you would obviously have that. Could you then please forward those reports?

Ms Hendon: Are you saying interstate comparators?

The CHAIR: Yes, so that we get interstate comparisons. You are saying 200 computers for either a high school or group of schools. Is that based on WA or are you basing that on formulas elsewhere, in which case have productivity assessments been done elsewhere, or what are the formulas elsewhere? Can you let us know when you provide us with that supplementary information?

[11.15 am]

Ms Hendon: Yes, we will tell you what justification is of the 200. But it is based on consultation we have done with ICT officers in schools, so it based on the needs of Western Australian ICT officers.

Mr Clarke: Vaguely, I think that 100 to 200 also assumes that with a school of that size, you are going to have a certain amount of students in it. You are also going to have a certain amount of audiovisual equipment or other specialist IT equipment. So as the number of computers in the school goes up, so does the number of additional equipment that needs to be supported. I think the figure the department supplied was about 100 to 400. I think that might be why our figure is quite low; it is because we are also including other devices that an IT officer would support in a school.

The CHAIR: Should we let you finish?

Ms Bootsma: So the second issue I just wanted to raise was to do with the helpdesk support; customer support. In my school, we are not a standard operating environment, so we have an admin server, a curriculum server and a library server. The curriculum server actually feeds the programs through to all of the teaching areas. If that curriculum server goes down for any reason, that means that teachers do not have access to computers in the classrooms. Our school works on the attendance being recorded on the Integris program which the department has. Also, behaviour is actually typed into this system so that everyone can access it and see if a student has been misbehaving on a number of occasions. So if the curriculum server goes down, it means that, until we can get an IT technician in, they have not got access to that information. It also means they cannot bring up any data in the classroom on the students. If there is a health problem or maybe custody orders or something, they cannot quickly go to the system and just check to make sure everything is in order. It does create a problem. That is something that I think is difficult.

The other thing with the helpdesk, as Rikki mentioned, was that it does give low-level support. For me, in the administration office, I can get a lot of support if things go down for me on my computer or, say, the principal, deputies, my school officer. Anywhere else in the school, they cannot provide help. If there is something that goes wrong—the principal does dabble a little in computers at our school, and in the past we have had teachers who have had the knowledge; we do not have that this year—then really be have to wait until an outside provider comes in. We pay for that service. We pay $5 600 for 70 hours of support. That can run for 18 months, but we will use that up all this year. In that amount, for each visit to the school, half an hour of that is travel time for them to come to our school. Our school is in Rockingham, so it is classed as the metropolitan area. So it is not cheap; it is not a cheap service really. How we worked in the past is that we have organised regular visits, so it might be half a day a week or half a day a fortnight when we just, standard, have somebody coming out. However, if a problem occurs three days after they have been, we ring up. It might be two days before we can get a technician out. So you can imagine if the teachers cannot access their computers for two days, that becomes a problem.

The CHAIR: So for three hours down at Rockingham, that is four hours—half hour travel time each way—of your 70 hours.

Ms Bootsma: Yes; that is correct. The helpdesk, as I say, often they are helpful, but we have had situations. One of my deputies, every time she had to change the password on her email address, it would freeze. She would ring up. The helpdesk would tell her she had done something wrong; she had not. Then I actually went in with her and watched her do everything. She did everything she should have done. It still froze. So I rang up and said, "Look, this happened to me and they got it fixed for me." They said, "No, we can't do that anymore." It took seven months to fix this problem. Every time they kept saying, "Well, you must be doing something wrong." I said, "Well, no. The two of us have written it down. We have gone through everything." There are times when we are questioned about "You must have done this" or "Somebody else at your school must have done this", which is very annoying when you know that that is not the situation.

Other times the helpdesk can fix it up in five minutes. But sometimes you are on the phone for half an hour, 45 minutes. That is half an hour, 45 minutes of my time that I cannot be paying cheques, processing pays, looking after my staff. So that is an issue.

Probably the third thing, if I could just give a little bit of an idea of costings. Obviously for my school I can give approximate amounts. I have been at my school for 10 years. When I first went there, there was about 410 students. There is now only about 330. Over that 10 years, our IT allocation has dropped from around about $25 000 a year to about $16 500. So this year we got approximately $16 500. With that, we need to be replacing our computers. The department's policy is that they should be replaced approximately every four years. We have to replace three servers. The servers have to be replaced every three years, and they cost around $3 000 each. Over a three-year period, we are looking at $9 000 to $10 000 just in server costs alone. Then of course you have got your printers—all that sort of thing. Two years ago we decided to put interactive whiteboards into our school. We had not had them before. We did not have the money so we did a lease. It was $68 000 over three years for the lease of interactive whiteboards. That still does not give an interactive whiteboard for our kindergarten students. As I say, if you are paying for the IT tech to be done, you are trying to replace some computers, even if you replace only 10 a year, you are still looking at nearly $9000 or $10 000. Then, as I say, we have the lease. Really—

The CHAIR: You also get money, though, from the federal government as well, do you not ?

Ms Bootsma: No. Primary schools do not.

The CHAIR: Is that just the high schools?

Ms L.L. BAKER: That has stopped in the high schools, too, has it not, as of next year? I thought Gonski, there was something around—anyway, I digress.

Ms Bootsma: I am not sure about high schools, because I am not in them, but certainly primary schools do not.

The CHAIR: That was just the high schools, was it? I misunderstood that then.

Ms Bootsma: Yes, it was. So for a primary school, it is not easy. There is no way that we can actually employ a technician as such. In the past, as I say, we have utilised teachers, deputies, principals to do a little bit.

The CHAIR: What if you asked your parents to buy tablets—$300 or $400? How would that work in the school?

Ms Bootsma: Because I am in a low socioeconomic school, it would not be practical to do that, no, unfortunately. There are probably some of the schools where —

Ms L.L. BAKER: They cannot pay their $50 fee to come to school, Janet. They are hardly likely to fork out $300.

Ms Bootsma: That is an issue for us. Last year I think about 28 per cent of our primary school parents paid the voluntary contribution of $60. So we missed out. I think we worked it out; it was about $15 000 if every parent had paid their money. We have missed out on that. It does impact on us hugely. Whereas high schools at least, they do have part of the government grant that goes to them, so they do get some money. Whereas a primary school we can go without getting any money whatsoever.

I think they were probably the points that I felt that perhaps could just give you a little bit more of an indication of what happens.

The CHAIR: Russell, over to you.

Mr Clarke: Being an IT officer in a school, I can probably come from a perspective of working in a school where there is effective on-site support. I have been told recently that they want a few more of me; there is not enough of me to go around as it is. This will be my seventh year I have been working in high schools.

Mr P. ABETZ: As IT?

Mr Clarke: As IT, yes. Probably the one that has just popped into my head is, because the school initially funded my position out of trading in teacher time, I think—the salary pool—I am on a fixed-term contract at the moment. I have applied for my job about three times in the past seven years.

Ms L.L. BAKER: You have been employed for seven years on a fixed-term contract?

Mr Clarke: Yes.

The CHAIR: Two years, two years, two years.

Mr Clarke: Yes.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Stating the obvious: that is appalling.

Mr Clarke: I think it has changed now with the IPS system. Because our high school now is IPS, they are able to offer permanent positions.

Ms L.L. BAKER: They are.

Mr Clarke: But in the past, because a high school has traded in teacher allocation to add to the salary pool, you cannot create permanent positions out of it, so they have to be fixed term. Personally, that is a big thing for me.

Over those seven years, there has been no formal training structure offered by the department. I am lucky, I do know the system, how it works, who to contact. It can be quite complicated learning the various policies and procedures of the department.

Mr P. ABETZ: They do not provide any handbook or anything?

Mr Clarke: There is a department intranet that provides information. There is a lot of information on there, and it does change relatively frequently; every six to 12 months there will be a change. We usually discover by chance.

Mr P. ABETZ: They do not email you to notify you of changes?

Mr Clarke: A lot of the emails go to school principals; they do not go directly to us.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Do you have any indication, Russell about whether your school intends to make your position permanent, with its new IPS standing?

Mr Clarke: I believe it is. My job has been advertised this week.

Ms L.L. BAKER: That is a good indication. Well done.

Mr Clarke: I believe permanency is on there.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Good.

Ms Hendon: Just to intervene, Russell has to reapply for that after being in the job for seven years.

Ms L.L. BAKER: That is not so good. But the fact that it is a permanent position is good.

Mr Clarke: Yes.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Do you have any idea how many other IPS schools are heading down that path, from your network?

Mr Clarke: No. I could make something up, but it would not be very accurate.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Do not do that; it is not good on *Hansard*. You do not have any idea do you, Rikki?

Ms Hendon: Because the whole point of IPS is that it varies depending on the principal at every school, we are going to get a variety probably of different approaches to this.

Ms L.L. BAKER: It is interesting to ask that question.

Mr P. ABETZ: I am on an IPS school board, and at our recent board meeting it was discussed about having a half-time IT person who is also a half-time teacher, to create a full-time position.

Ms L.L. BAKER: We are doing that, too.

The CHAIR: Russell, do you or does the department give the teachers training in ICT and ICT tools in the classroom? Who is that done with at the grassroots level? Where do the teachers get that information from to help them with the whiteboards and the iPads the children are bringing in and the other equipment?

Mr Clarke: It is a tough one to say. Most examples where teachers have utilised these technology are the ones that are passionate about using these tools and have picked up the skills themselves.

The CHAIR: So there are no courses that teachers go off to learn about IT that is from the education department?

Mr Clarke: There could be. I cannot say there is not.

The CHAIR: Could I then ask Joyce or Rikki whether you could follow up on that and get back to us to let us know whether your teachers are going off and getting support in that area, because that might be something —

Ms Hendon: It is hard for us to say because we do not represent teachers.

Mr P. ABETZ: Perhaps I could just mention that at schools in my area, the teachers went on a PD day to learn to use the interactive whiteboards, for example. That was organised by the regional office, if I am not mistaken. Teachers had that opportunity then to tap into the PD to do that.

The CHAIR: We could ask regional offices what IT programs. Brian, we could write to the regional offices and ask each regional office what they are doing in relation to IT for teachers in the schools.

[11.30 am]

Mr Clarke: I do believe there is some training offered throughout the system. I am not sure if it is handled centrally or not, but then again a lot of it is ad hoc. With the new cluster arrangement where schools are building in an area, clustering together, I think there is a confidence being held by the cluster itself, next term, in that there is a provision of IT PD in there. I do not think that one is handled centrally.

Ms Bootsma: If I could just add, in my school when we went into the lease, the teachers came to an agreement that they would do some PD with the people that installed the interactive whiteboards, so the teachers have done that by PD. The other thing is that the professional learning institute does not provide any kind of IT support at all. My understanding from most staff is that if you want to have some sort of training, you need to actually seek it out yourself. Even to the extent of the Integris (SIS) program that the department has—that is the one that all the student data goes on—if we get PD in specific areas of that, the school pays a couple of hundred dollars to go to that PD. Then, obviously, if it is in school time, which often it is, they would also have to pay for the relief person as well.

The CHAIR: Can I ask you, Rikki—we will come back to Russell—you said about the OS3 to the OS4 and we are aware that the OS —

Ms Bootsma: SOE—standard operating environment.

Ms Hendon: I am with you.

The CHAIR: The new operating environment allows them to put in the number and in the central office you can try and fix the bugs at the local area. How is that rollout going both in the metropolitan area and in regional areas?

Ms Hendon: Our understanding of it—we may not have the most up-to-date information because the department may have done more rollouts since we submitted our submission—is that there is still a number of schools to be put on the system. From what I understand, the vast majority are primary schools; a lot of the primary schools still are not on the system. They are also the schools that tend not be able to afford ICT officers.

The CHAIR: When they go on, does that make your work—so you are at high school, are you not?

Mr Clarke: Yes.

The CHAIR: So you would not know, but would you expect that them going on to OS4 would make the IT officer for that cluster of primary schools, if it is one per three, will it make their workload easier because they would be able to say, "Can you try and fix this one?"

Mr Clarke: I would say in workload, my opinion is that it would help a little bit. I mean, there is a lot of other things that you have to do when you are on the SOE4; if you have a problem, instead of the person on-site being able to fix it, they have to negotiate for a helpdesk and log a job and then that job is assigned a priority based on what else is happening across the entire system. So in a way, work value, it might lessen the complexity of the range skills that a person on-site has to do, but I do not necessarily believe it would —

The CHAIR: Save much time.

Mr Clarke: Yes.

The CHAIR: That is okay, I just wondered in relation to that.

Ms Bootsma: Would you mind if I just added a little bit to that, too? From a primary school point of view, yes, the SOE4 technical support when things go down would cut out the problems with the curriculum server and that, but at the end of the day, that is still not going to be able to purchase the new computers and install them and configure them and put the new printers in. If there is a printer problem, they are still not going to be able to help with that. So all of those issues are still there for us, and sometimes I feel that the department does not recognise how difficult that can be for staff.

The CHAIR: I think it was an excellent choice bringing a registrar with you to this meeting today!

Ms Hendon: One of many that tells us all of these issues!

Mr Clarke: The SOE and the department arranging all these—the department has got a whole range of contracts and preferred suppliers, and that is really good for schools because there is a lot of work that schools do not have to spend time doing, like when you are purchasing a certain item, there is a contract that you can look up, you have got a list of suppliers and generally you do not have to negotiate pricing. There are lots of things that save the school time but at the end of it, the school still needs to do that process. If you want to buy a computer, you still need to do the purchasing process or get the computer out of the box on the desk; you still need someone on-site to unpack it, put it through the asset register and get it working.

Mr P. ABETZ: The issue of confidence of teachers in being able to use IT, is that something that is sort of holding it back, or the lack of training? What are some of the barriers at the school level for using IT, in your opinion?

Mr Clarke: If a teacher is a bit reluctant to delve into new technologies or if they want to start using an interactive whiteboard, I find that if there is a person on-site, if they plug in their computer, the interactive whiteboard does not turn on, which happens quite often. Once or twice a week I get a call to say they have plugged everything in and it does not work, but because I am there, in five minutes I can be in the classroom and rescue the teacher's lesson plan. So I think for my school, we have a few teachers that are using ICT in the classroom basically because there is someone there to support them if it breaks, and I think that gives a big confidence boost to the teacher. The younger teachers coming out of university are generally more well-trained and more willing to take on new things. The older teachers are not as likely to, but if there is IT support in schools, they generally will, given the opportunity.

Ms Bootsma: If I could perhaps just back that up, I had a teacher, who was older, but she said her interactive whiteboard was not working, so for two weeks she went without it. When the IT people came, she had not turned the plug on. But because we had not got anybody, nobody even thought that it would just be a matter of the switch not being on, so that probably confirms that.

Could I just also say, from a registrar point of view because I am the one that does the changing of the passwords and all of that sort of thing, it varies. There are some young teachers who obviously have a really good knowledge of info tech and they are fine and they are very competent and what have you, but there are some young ones that still do forget their passwords and do get locked out of things. So all of that, it is a case of coming to me, I have to go in, unlock it if it has been locked, give them a new password and even sometimes when you have given that information to them, they still do not get it right and you have to start all over again. So it probably does tend to be some of the older generation, but that is not always the case.

The CHAIR: I might ask, maybe Rikki, to then sum up from your perspective now. I can give you two minutes for that, I am afraid!

Ms Hendon: Okay, I will make it quick! Really we see that ICT is going to become more and more important in schools. As the years go on, technology is going to become a bigger and bigger part of education. We need to support that technology and we need to do that by making sure that it is reliable and that it works well and to do that we need to actually resource the support for those systems and all that equipment. Because of that, we believe that the department needs to employ

ICT officers in schools to provide that local support. We think that they do an invaluable job and that is what is really a glaring omission from the current resourcing of schools and the current set-up. That is really the basis of what we think needs to be changed. I mean, there are other bits here and there, but really someone who can take on all of that workload, make sure that it is not a teacher or a deputy or a school support officer who is doing that work because it is diverting resources away from the core function that they are supposed to be doing. This is a substantial role in and of itself that needs to be fulfilled. That is really the crux of the issue.

The CHAIR: I have one last question for Russell. We were very fortunate last week, we went to this most amazing educational institute in Brisbane where we saw some wonderful new devices and they discussed iCloud and other servers. How long do you think it will be before our schools move—or will our schools move—to an iCloud-based server? Is that something maybe the independent schools might look at, or do you think that we are a decade away in WA from that type of advance in technology?

Mr Clarke: It is a very tough question to answer, I think. It depends on—with the iCloud solutions I think there are some regulatory issues of where the data is hosted and who manages it. There are technology projects coming in where certain institutions, certainly the education department–size institutions, can host that sort of service and provide it out to students and student devices. I think maybe within five years definitely people will start heading towards those services; I think the trend is to do that.

The CHAIR: I thank you very much for the evidence you have given to the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for the correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to it. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Once again, thank you all very much for coming along today.

Hearing concluded at 11.41 am