

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

**INQUIRY INTO CHANGES TO THE POST-COMPULSORY
CURRICULUM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 31 AUGUST 2005**

SESSION TWO

Members

Mr T.G. Stephens (Chairman)

Dr E. Constable

Mrs D.J. Guise

Dr K.D. Hames

Mr J.N. Hyde

Mr T.K. Waldron

Mr M.P. Whitely

Hearing commenced at 10.16 am**JACKSON, MRS AUDREY**

**Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia,
PO Box 386,
North Beach 6020, examined:**

PARKIN, DR GLENDA

**Principal, St Stephen's School and Representative, Association of Independent Schools of
Western Australia,
PO Box 68,
Greenwood 6924, examined:**

GOULD, MRS VALERIE

**Deputy Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia,
PO Box 1817,
Osborne Park 6017, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: With formal proceedings we take the opportunity of reminding witnesses that the committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament.

Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes attached?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and have you read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your submission and your attendance at the committee this morning. Do you have any additional commentary to make on your submission, in view of the fact that a rather dynamic discussion is going on in the community and some developments have occurred since you made your submission? Alternatively, do you wish to speak to your submission briefly before I open the hearing up to members to ask questions?

Mrs Jackson: I would like the opportunity for Glenda Parkin and Valerie Gould to comment. Glenda is the principal of St Stephen's School, which is a large, low-fee independent school with years 11 and 12 cohorts, which will span the range of achievements and desires for their future. In particular, we would like to make comment through Valerie Gould on the issue of assessment, which is of significant concern.

Dr Parkin: Thank you. As a school we always felt that the new courses of study should serve all students better. We feel, despite the best intentions, that the lower-ability students will be worse off. Our reasoning is that currently a dual system operates under which lower-ability students take

courses that are suited to their needs. They are practically focused and they achieve well. Because they are achieving, they enjoy being at school. They stay at school and leave school in many cases with VET certificates or recognition for prior learning and then go on to TAFE colleges. After a short time at TAFE some of our students go to university anyway. Meanwhile, students who are heading for university have classes focused for that. They can be extended and succeed at their very best rate. Our concern is that the concept of a "course that all students undertake" will mean that students with a minimum entry level into those courses will struggle with literacy and numeracy. Possibly students with learning difficulties - I do not mean disabilities - will be with other students who are high-flyers wanting to gain university entrance. We think the challenge for a teacher, say in engineering, could be to teach students who are practically brilliant with their hands but unable to do the higher, more demanding, academic part of that work.

[10:25 am]

We feel that that will disadvantage students at both ends because the teacher will find it very difficult to accommodate the huge range of needs of students who really, even though they may be 16, might have some skills that ordinarily we might expect perhaps of a 13 or 14-year-old. So that is a concern for us. Another concern is the reduced number of courses that will be available for lower-ability students. For example, at the moment they can do VET-type based courses in things like furniture making, metalwork and a range of courses in retail, childcare and so on, which really suits those students. The number of courses will now be reduced to 32, and will include things like physics, chemistry, geography and history, which in themselves are good courses for some students but not, in our opinion, for all students. The fact that there will be fewer options for lower-ability students is of concern. Another is that, even though we like the idea of external assessment, we are concerned that if external assessment is going to be for every year 11 and year 12 student in the state, which we did not ever see as the original intention, there is a risk that the easiest and least expensive way to do that will be with written papers. How on earth will some of these students, who are very practically based students, be able to achieve and show their skills in those sorts of courses? If we were to perhaps assess the products that they have made, how will we manage that as a state? Let us look at furniture making. Are we going to have a point at which students have to send in all their models and have them assessed? That is extreme, but they are the major concerns for us in understanding whether we are really going to cater better for the whole of our cohort, in particular knowing that we are talking about an increase in the school age. We are talking about all those students, some of whom would perhaps have moved onto other things in the current structures. At our campus at Carramar, 50 per cent of our students are doing TAFE-bound courses. We have students who do well in academic courses as well, but this year, across both our campuses, we have 250 students who are looking for TAFE as a destination in the first instance. We are just not convinced that those students are going to be better off. Our other major concern is assessment, but I will leave Val to talk about that.

Another concern that we have - pressure has already been put on me, I guess, by our staff, and I understand their thinking - is that the staff are saying to us that if they will be expected to have students able to achieve levels 7 and 8 in upper school, they will need more time in lower school to be able to achieve that level of achievement by the time students are in years 11 and 12. The sorts of subjects we are talking about in particular are those subjects that currently we might see as options. For example, they may be some of the subjects in the home economics area, the design and technology area or the IT area, where in the lower school through years 8 to 10 those subjects do not have as much time on the timetable. If we are looking at a typical week, most schools would have five or six classes in English, science, mathematics, society and environment and then, of course, the compulsory two hours of phys ed that we are required by the federal government to provide. That does not leave enough time to also then have six lessons of music, six lessons of LOTE, six lessons of design and technology, six lessons of IT - I could keep going, but you have got the picture. That is a concern. Our staff are saying to us, "You are going to ask me to get

students to the highest levels by the time they finish upper school. How can I do that if you are not going to give me more time in lower school?" We are already starting to think about whether we then say to year 10s that they are going to have to decide what their courses will be for upper school and start to specialise more in year 10 so that they have a better foundation for upper school. That is a dilemma. Is that what we really want? Do we want to force kids -

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Can I just interrupt?

Dr Parkin: Yes, of course.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Do you see that one of the platforms of the change is that it is narrowing the options, rather than opening them up?

Dr Parkin: Yes, absolutely. It would force them to specialise sooner, and I would see that as a negative because, really, if you are asking year 10s, that means you are asking them as year 9s. This time of the year - this very week - is when we do our course counselling with students. We would be saying to year 9s, some of whom would still be 13 - most would be 14 by this time but a good number of them are still 13 - to make a choice about what they are going to do in year 10, based on what they want to do in years 11 and 12; whereas at the moment we deliberately, as I am sure most schools do, keep that broad. That would narrow that choice.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Would you mind if I interrupt again?

Dr Parkin: No, of course not.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I ask just so that I understand what you are saying. The teachers are saying that in order to do their job well for years 11 and 12 students, they would actually need to bring the students back to year 10 and spend more time to have them prepared for years 11 and 12?

[10.30 am]

Dr Parkin: Yes. Let us say, for example, a student is interested in IT. At the moment, that student could do that in year 9 and year 10 as an option, but it could be only two periods a week or four periods a week at the most. The IT teachers would argue with me, I am sure, but that will not provide them with sufficient background to get to the very high levels of 7 and 8 by the end of year 12. The only way to do that would be to say to students, "You've got less choice." Either that, or you take away time from what we still think of in some ways, even though it is old language, as the core subjects. In other words, do we take away time from English, maths, science, and society and environment to be able to provide the extra time in the school day for students to be able to have more time at IT, more time at music? It is a whole range of things. It could be dance, it could be drama, it could be media or home economics - all those sorts of things. It is a whole range of things, whereas at the moment they choose from those, and they do just little bits.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: As an introduction.

Dr Parkin: As an introduction, and you build on that through years 9 and 10, but there is nowhere enough time to be able to know that you have a good foundation if you are going to take it to the highest levels in upper school. That is a concern because, as I said before, it is asking the students to make choices earlier and forcing them to take a narrower course, which I do not think was really anybody's intention. It also has practical implications too in terms of facilities within schools. For example, let us say a lot more students decided that they were going to specialise in some of the design and technology areas. You need expensive rooms, if you like, and equipment to be able to deliver those courses. Are there going to be the resources to be able to provide those extra facilities? Also, it has implications for just deploying your staff, which of course in an independent school is a bit more complex perhaps than in a state school, where you can say, "Sorry, we don't need you this year. Move on." Even so, practically, some of the areas we would be talking about giving more time to in order to achieve those high levels are areas in which there are shortages of

teachers anyway. IT is one, for example, as is, again, design and technology. It is difficult to get teachers in those areas. They would be additional concerns that we have.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dr Parkin. I think Mrs Gould will now deal with the issue of assessment.

Mrs Gould: Yes. I will just pick on one thing that Dr Parkin said. In terms of the VET students, a lot of work has been done saying that this system will actually cater for those VET students better than they have been catered for in the past. Certainly, revising the new WACE we have now, with slightly different requirements than the WACE that was publicised about a year ago, has gone to some extent to fix that. However, those very strong VET students actually stand at risk of not graduating now under the new system because of the way that structured workplace learning and VET will be treated under the new system. I have done quite a lot of modelling with schools on what they are currently doing, and it is still of concern to us that some of these students will just not graduate.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Could you expand on that, please?

Mrs Gould: Currently, to graduate under the new WACE, you need to get the equivalent of four courses of study and 12 Curriculum Council developed units, and then you can have eight endorsed units. Now, that is under the new WACE.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: WACE being the WA Certificate of Education?

Mrs Gould: The new Western Australian Certificate of Education. That is one of the new post-compulsory -

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Yes.

Mrs Gould: Currently, to graduate you need to get an average of CO8 subjects, and that is, you could say, equivalent to 16 courses that are units, because they are all half size, but you can include in that some VET equivalents and some structured workplace learning. I have schools at the moment that are graduating with three Curriculum Council subjects, a lot of VET at a TAFE and structured workplace learning. They are meeting the eight-subject requirement and they are meeting completion of 10 subjects. It is a bit hard without a diagram here. In the new system, three Curriculum Council subjects will equate to only three courses of study, which means they will not graduate, and it will also be only six council-developed units, or possibly 10 or 12. It varies a bit, depending on how many they take. If you are currently taking English, work studies and, say, information technology, which is a fairly general course, and then you are doing VET and structured workplace learning, you will graduate. If you take English, information technology and career and enterprise, which is the replacement of work studies, in the new WACE you will not graduate, because your structured workplace learning and your VET will not contribute in the same way to graduation.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: What would you have to add to that to graduate?

Mrs Gould: You would have to do at least another course of study. You would have to add another course of study into it, because structured workplace learning currently counts as a subject, and then it will not count as a developed unit. It is really the change in the way they have treated SWL, but also a course of study is defined as whether you do one, two, three or four units. Therefore, whereas year 11 and year 12 English are currently two subjects, four units in English will be only one course of study.

Mrs Jackson: We can provide a diagram.

Mrs Gould: I can provide a diagram, if you want it. I actually have a diagram with me.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That would be beneficial to members.

Mrs Gould: I have a diagram that we can certainly send to you. Where it is supposed to be picked up is the nature of VET as a course of study, but the development of VET as a course of study has been hugely problematic. Certainly, in talking to people from the training side of the Department of Education and Training, they really do not like it. They are saying that VET is quite pure; we should do VET with training providers in the way it was designed; we should not try to break it into bits and cobble it into a course of study. That is what is happening. The training people really do not like the embedding of VET. Therefore, the students, if they want higher standing in the VET sector, would rather do stand-alone VET, but then they may be compromised in graduation. I can have something forwarded to the inquiry with a few examples of what it is doing.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: That would be excellent.

Mrs Gould: Sorry about that aside. I just picked up on something that was said.

The CHAIRMAN: I think you were going to proceed to -

Mrs Gould: Assessment. Sorry about that. You may be aware that I am actually on the post-compulsory ministerial task force, so I have been working very closely on all of this for the past two or three months, I suppose. We have been working very hard on the assessment, how we will manage school-managed assessment and, of course, what the external assessment will look like. At the moment the courses of study are designed with five scales of achievement, levels 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, and each of those will be split into three bands: first, medium and high. Therefore, you sort of have a 15-point scale. To make judgments on those, teachers will have to look at the scales of achievement and the contributing aspects of achievement or the indicators of that level to make those judgments. How those judgments are made - whether you do it by ticking boxes or whatever - is hugely problematic. Certainly, it is a great moderation issue, but I think it also leaves teachers open to the comment, "You've made this judgment that is going to change my life based on what?" I guess it is fine to be able to do that in primary and lower school where the stakes are not high, but in a high-stakes world, you really want to be sure that if you have a 7.8, you really have a 7.8, and it should not have been given an 8.2, or whatever the difference might be, because that becomes the difference. I know there are only relatively small numbers that want to get into law and engineering at UWA, and most of this happens because of the high-level universities; however, it is still a student's future, and we all know how vulnerable students are at that age if they miss out and they start to think, or their parents think, that something unfair has been happening. It puts teachers under a lot of pressure. The paper that is actually suggesting something like that went to the Curriculum Council this morning, and it will probably be approved in principle, I think.

This was not put in our submission, but I have looked quite carefully at how New South Wales and Victoria do it. They actually have things aligned to outcomes; they have them aligned to levels or bands of achievement; but they actually create what is called a rubric next to the assessment task, and people mark with marks, so they can say, "If you can do these sorts of things, you will get between 16 and 20. If you do these sorts of things, you will get between 12 and 15." Therefore, it is much more familiar to the teachers, and it is a marking system that is much more friendly and more understandable to students and to parents. I think we all know there has been a lot of angst out there about what levels really mean. You get that finer-grain distinction without taking progress maps, which were never designed for high-stakes assessment, and trying to make them do the high-stakes assessment. In New South Wales and Victoria, they actually tried to go down that pure outcomes line, and they thought, "Well, it's really hard to take the good practice of lower school and convert it into high-stakes assessment."

[10.40 am]

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Is that less onerous on teachers?

Mrs Gould: It is less onerous because it is a more familiar system. It is sort of what they have been doing. Certainly, when I used to teach, if I had an essay to mark out of 20, I knew what I

expected for kids to get 18 or 20 and I knew what a 10 out of 20 essay looked like. I would always give feedback and say, "Well, you got 10 out of 20 because you didn't do this and this. However, these points were covered." That is what teachers have always done. It would be a much more familiar system. It would also be much more acceptable to the maths and science teachers who, of course, are the ones who are really wary of this system of assessment. I found myself to be in a bit of a hard situation because I am on the task force and helped put this package together. That was part of our role on the task force. However, from what I see happening in schools, it will be very hard for that to happen, because we are trying to take progress maps and make them do things for which they were never designed.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: If I understand this correctly, these recommendations will go from the task force to the Curriculum Council.

Mrs Gould: The paper went to the council this morning. It is very much in principle. The in principle statements of procedures do not run counter to the Victorian or New South Wales view. In terms of the regulations and its implementation, you could take it and still keep the principles sound, because it still fits with the units. It would also solve the grading problem. I have a method for solving the grading problem with units, but I will not go through that now. There is no question that we will have to grade units. I guess that was one. The other part of the assessment is the whole issue of external assessment, which has been alluded to. There is a draft timetable for 2008, which means that there will be four weeks of assessment beginning in October and going through November. Students in year 12 will have a much shorter year, but of course the system will also encourage years 11 and 12 students to mix in units, which means that everyone will probably have to finish work by the end of the third week in October. Also, if there is to be external assessment, we cannot just say that, come 26 October, it will be the first time that students do a two or three-hour exam that is worth 50 per cent of their course. Some of those exams have to happen during the two years to provide students with practice and familiarity. We will start to lose a lot of teaching time for the external assessment. I have been looking at other states as well. There is the Queensland model, which has the core skills test but also a highly supported school-based assessment and moderation system. That has been in place in Queensland for many years. I know that the Curriculum Council has visited Queensland and had a look at its model. The response when it has been suggested is that the universities will not have a bar of it, but I really do not know whether the universities have really considered what it means in terms of how much students will not be learning because they will be doing all this assessment. Will they get the amount of mathematics and physics teaching and so forth that they currently get? They will probably lose at least six to eight weeks in year 12 in doing assessment. Yes, we will have a general achievement test, which will sort out the moderation. We could easily have a core skills test, which is done in August in Queensland so that it does not focus on the end of the year. Teachers can keep teaching through to the middle of November and have a very strong and rigorous moderation process in place, with moderation panels to look at things. There are alternatives that I do not believe have been sufficiently explored. Of course, all this takes time.

The CHAIRMAN: I will perhaps go from the submission of Mrs Gould and Dr Parkin to yours, Mrs Jackson. Your submission describes support from your association for change, but we now have in front of us some pretty significant concerns that were articulated by Dr Parkin and, in turn, Mrs Gould. We know that we are dealing with something that is pretty dynamic in its modification. Where are we up to? Are you saying that there is a way to modify this system to accommodate the concerns that are being articulated by Dr Parkin? Dr Parkin has identified a particularly fundamental problem, yet we have an association that is still articulating support for change. Can you help me through this?

Mrs Jackson: As an association, we strongly believed when the change was mooted that this was something that was in fact going to benefit the majority of students who proceed through to years 11 and 12 - that it would take the focus away from the 30 or 40 per cent who want to go to

university. The problem for the association has been in the implementation. We have a couple of fairly thick files of correspondence between us and the Curriculum Council that articulate the problems that we have articulated to you today, particularly in relation to assessment and the needs of students. At the moment, the students who are doing wholly school-assessed subjects and who get As and Bs come out feeling that they are achieving, that they can learn and that they will go on. This may seem odd when one thinks of league tables and the emphasis put on them, but what we are really worried about is those students who, as Glenda clearly pointed out, will not be advantaged.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: When you say that they will not be advantaged, are you telling us that they will be disadvantaged?

Mrs Jackson: In some cases, yes they will - the students Valerie referred to who are heavily VET oriented and who do a couple of courses in school and spend a lot of time in really good, structured workplace learning. I think we have come to the fact that the devil is in the detail. I have come to the conclusion that the present model has some serious flaws, but all new models have serious flaws when they are proposed. The trick with implementation is to be honest enough to identify those flaws and to do something about them. It is not that we have fundamentally changed our position, because we still think that we need to look at upper school, particularly in the light of the increase in the school leaving age, and to offer really valuable learning experiences to all students. However, we are concerned that despite the good work of the task force, there are still issues that have to be addressed.

The CHAIRMAN: We have two choices in front of us - to maintain the existing system or to adopt a new system as it is evolving. Are you advocating that the new system needs further modification, essentially to accommodate the concerns, or that it cannot be modified in a way that would, for instance, accommodate the concerns of Dr Parkin? Is there a way to modify the system so that lower achieving students are not disadvantaged by this change?

Mrs Jackson: I believe that there is a way of modifying the system. I believe that we have the expertise within the three school education sectors in Western Australia to put those in place, but it would require some people to step back from very strongly and honestly held philosophical positions. I will look back at assessment and make a comment on that. Good teachers have always taught with an outcomes focus; it just has not been articulated in that way. Even if, in the old days, a teacher gave marks out of 20, as Valerie said, the teacher would point out how a 10 out of 20 essay could have been improved. That is using an outcomes focus. The thing is that it was never designed for the high stakes "let us create a four digit number so that we can rank students for university". If we could simply cure that problem, I think we could see some of the other things fall out. The other significant problem I would want to be resolved is the issue for the VET students, because there will be an increasing number of those students. The amendment that has just gone to state Parliament foreshadows a structure in terms of a course of study - sorry, I should not use that term because it already has one definition - or a year 11 or year 12 program that will not fit, in many ways, the course of study outline that we have. If there were two imperatives that would make this better, one would be assessment and one would be vocational education and training.

[10.50 am]

The CHAIRMAN: On the concerns about the grade high stakes and the concerns of parents and students about the changes, already there will be levels of concern among students, parents and teachers about the existing systems and the four digit assessment. Is it simply that, because we have something new, those existing concerns are increasingly in focus; that the four digit assessment is, in many ways, arbitrary, despite its claim for precision, and we head to a new system that comes into the spotlight that has risks attached to it, but is not necessarily better or worse, although it is claimed to be better than what we had? Would you provide me with some commentary on that rambling discourse?

Mrs Gould: There are certainly problems with the current system. I would be the first to say yes. I worked with the Curriculum Council for many years and I am quite familiar with the moderation and the statistical moderation that goes through. It is a familiar system, people trust it, and it has been around for a long time, and there is no question about it. Yes, it does rank people and the difference of 0.05 can make that difference between getting into the high stakes. That is a problem and it is a real shame that the schooling sector seems to be the body that has to come up with the results so that the universities can select students. We cannot get rid of that one at the moment. A lot of people understand the current system. I have talked to parents and students about how the moderation happens and how the adjustment happens, so they can actually see what happens to their marks from go to whoa.

A document going into the council this morning, which I saw only last Friday afternoon, talks about the new moderation system and it has a three-phase Rasch modelling that happens. I will not explain Rasch modelling to you, but it comes up with a degree of difficulty and it reapplies that to the subjects to rank them. It is the biggest black box that anyone could ever see. To understand Rasch modelling you have to have many degrees in statistics. It is very complex programming. We will have to go from 7.2 to 7.5 to a four digit number and make sure that the subjects are comparable. It will literally go into this thing and come out and no-one will be able to tell anyone exactly what happens.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that dramatically different from the current scaling system?

Mrs Gould: It is much different, because no-one understands how it happens.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not consider myself dumb mathematically, but the mathematics of the scaling system look black boxish.

Mrs Gould: They are. When drama became a tertiary entrance examination subject, I remember taking all the drama teachers in the public and Catholic sectors through moderation. They finally said it was not that hard. You have to take them through fairly slowly and follow students through to see how it happens. You may not like what happens in terms of being moderated down 15 to 20 per cent, but you can see the process by which it goes through. I do not believe a new process will be free and open. It is also based on what can be quite broad judgments at the beginning. You will never get anything better in than what you put in. We will be putting in 7.2 and coming up with 6.543. You cannot actually do that. If it is valid only to one decimal place to start off with, it cannot be valid to three decimal places at the end. All you have done is divide by difficult numbers to get to that point. Those are a lot of the concerns we have.

If we go to a numeric system and say we will keep marking out of 20 or 25, then you can really add up those numbers. You cannot add up scales of achievement and divide them by numbers. It does not work, because they are not a mark out of something; they are a point on a scale. I guess that is where the problem has arisen. They are trying to do things that actually should not be done to those numbers.

Mrs Jackson: It is also a matter of confidence in teacher judgment. At the moment if you were in a parent-teacher interview and you talk as a parent to a teacher about why they had given your son or daughter a particular mark - I am a maths and science teacher - the teacher will be able to point out the things the student could or could not do and the concepts the child still has to acquire. Teachers, because they have not been involved in it - I admit that - will try to sit down with a parent and explain that the student is working at level 7, which is a good level to be working at, and in terms of the outcome they are a level 7.3, 7.5 or a 7.8. I do not think teachers will feel, in the initial stages anyway - whether parents will understand is another matter - as confident about saying why they are at level 7.3 as opposed to 7 or 7.5. In time, they will learn it. Our problem is taking that and saying we believe that this student has achieved this level of outcomes and, therefore, we will rank him or her in this position. Our problem comes in the huge leap of faith in converting that into a mark.

Dr Parkin: I can contribute to that. I feel as though we have lost the way philosophically. Outcomes-based education is based on the highest level a student can achieve. We are then asked to average that. For example, there are a number of outcomes in English - one for reading, one for writing, one for viewing and one for speaking. We try to get the students along the levels of achievement as highly as they possibly can. To say that a student has achieved at level 6 in writing, but level 3 in speaking, does that mean they are the average of that?

The tension comes because outcomes-based education is about what a student can do or know, rather than what they cannot do or do not know. We are trying to turn that system into a system that deliberately sorts kids into a bell shape, so we have a norm standard deviation model. We want kids to be spread out in terms of ranking for university entrance. The whole thing is to sort out who are the good kids and who are the dumb kids - to put it in simple terms. To me, we are asking the outcomes-based education model to rank students for university or other entrance. The outcomes-based education model is not about ranking students. We are trying to get it to turn itself upside down; to do something it was not intended for.

I get concerned, and I know our staff does too, when we raise the issues with the Curriculum Council. The response tends to be, "We can generate a mathematical paradigm for that." That is just blinding people with science. My concern for our staff is, and we have lots of experienced staff, that they do not understand the system. That concerns me, because they will spend so much time worrying about whether they have assessed every single aspect. In some of the courses we are talking about there are tens and twenties of these things. They will get so bogged down in assessing that they will not have any energy left to teach. The focus will be on, "Let us get this assignment done and assessed, let us do the next assignment" and that will drive upper school. It is not the right way to go.

Many of us had great hopes when the review was first done, which was such a long time ago. Seriously, things have changed since the post-compulsory review was first done. It is the lack of detail and the fact that we are being asked to implement something before it is understood - papers are still being written and concepts discussed.

We have had parent information nights this past two weeks with parents of students from year 8 through to year 11. Parents of year 8 or 9 students are saying to us, "What will it look like when my child is in year 11?" We have to say, "We're not entirely sure, but trust us and our teachers." I really believe that our teachers and schools are as well prepared as anybody. We have been to every piece of professional development we can. I do not believe anybody understands the whole package - not even the people on the task force.

[11.00 am]

Mrs Gould: No. There are still too many unanswered questions.

Dr Parkin: Asking teachers to implement something as it is still being developed is fraught with danger. I say that as a principal, and I say it as a parent.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: In relation to assessment, do you see a way forward in terms of improvement? Frankly, students and parents still have a difficulty with the fact that, under the current system, they get a certain mark in the school and then find it is scaled to something entirely different because they are put against every child in the school. They find that to be totally unacceptable as well. The current system sucks, basically. We need to find a way through. Things have changed; you are right. The outcomes system was one way to go. We now have other imperatives that say, "No. You still have to grade students in a certain way." In among that, somehow or other, we have to find a new model that accommodates both. It is not without its difficulties. To put it simply, do you think it is entirely hopeless or is there a way through this process?

Mrs Gould: I think there is a way through.

Dr Parkin: There is a way through; there has to be. I like Val's suggestions or the task force's suggestions. What are New South Wales and Victoria doing? What is happening in Queensland? With all due respect, Western Australia is a wonderful place to live, but why are we trying, as a relatively small player in the scheme of things, to invent a totally new system that is not being used anywhere else? From a pragmatic point of view as a leader of a school, the pressure is on from Brendan Nelson to also report in grades. My understanding is that he will not budge on that matter.

Mrs Gould: No.

Dr Parkin: We will then have to turn all the levels into something else for somebody else. It is just such a waste of energy, effort and intellect in lots of ways - I know it is probably not the politically correct thing to say. I am very concerned about that aspect as well.

Mrs Jackson: In response to your question, I think the Queensland model gets rid of many issues. You have the core skills tests and well-moderated school assessments, and the universities in Queensland appear to have no problem in accepting the system. Also, there is no problem with them being part of the across-Australia structure in which all final year 12 results are ranked so that a student from Queensland could study medicine in Western Australia or vice versa.

Mrs Gould: As the Queensland model does not have external exams in every subject, money and resources in schools are freed up. It costs millions of dollars in this state each year to set exams and to mark them. The resources in Queensland are put into a much stronger moderation system. Queensland has moderation panels and every school has to send in every year a few sample assessments from their student cohort. It is then assessed by the moderation panel. If it states that a certain school has marked way down, the moderation panel works it through with the school. It happens during the year and not at the end of the year when the kid finds out in January what has happened. It is a much more robust moderation system. The core skills test is used to look at ranking between schools. If a school has students who generally score high, but who score way down on the core skills tests, the panel will visit the school and say things should be more aligned. It all happens during the year rather than at the end of the year. It is possible through the government's provision of resources and people power to do it. It is so well accepted by schools that it is almost a privilege to be selected on the moderation panels. People come from schools, and principals put up only their best teachers to be on the moderation panel. It is a great form of professional development in the sector. It can happen without external assessment at the end of the year through all the moderation. Doing all the assessment can be frustrating. Over the years, 85 per cent of students were being moderated down in the process.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Both you and Audrey alluded to the fact that it starts at the University of Western Australia. You have looked closely at the Queensland model. Do you have any clues on how they won over their university sector?

Dr E. CONSTABLE: It has been there for donkeys' years.

Mrs Gould: It has been there for a long time. It is hard to say when the universities say they will not accept anything but external assessment. One can present a solution to anyone - it can be presented so they like it or dislike it. I have suggested in one of our recommendations somewhere - I cannot remember where we wrote it - that we get people from Queensland to meet some school system people, some Curriculum Council people and university people to take them through that process.

Dr Parkin: I argue whether the last two years of education should be based on ranking students for university. Is that the main purpose of what schools are supposed to be doing in the last two years of education? Obviously, the majority of student will not go straight to university, yet this process has a huge impact on schools. It is just wrong. In my view, we are not serving our youth well if we have a system that focuses on universities driving the entire system.

Mrs Jackson: That is where our phrase of "Having great hopes for a new model" came from - we hoped it would change.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I ask you to comment on the timetable for the implementation of the courses of study. We have three courses to be implemented next year, and then a swag not longer after that. I leave that open for your comment.

Mrs Jackson: In relation to the courses of study planned to go ahead in 2006, the association believes they should go ahead. Some of them are courses of study that have been lobbied for for a long time by their proponents. I am thinking of aviation, which has already started, media and engineering. English as a trial will be very useful because it will involve so many students. I do not mean "trial" in the sense that English will decide the way forward. The subject involves so many students that it will be a real test of what will happen.

The chairman of the committee asked me whether the lack of familiarity with assessment posed the difficulties. I think we are coming down to the point at which we must say that we are looking at a dramatic change. If we have 20 courses of study next year on which professional development must begin, a very large number of teachers must not only understand the new process, but also must continue to teach effectively the students for whom they are responsible. It is my personal view - I think it would reflect that of the sector - that if that is to be the case, we should have the package by this stage. Teachers should be able to see what, for example, a chemistry course of study will look like. What will its content be? What is the recommended form of in-school assessment? What is the form and nature of any external assessment, if there will be any? That package needs to be complete. We have discussed among the three sectors the concept of readiness, and we should look at the readiness of those courses to be implemented.

[11.10 am]

I know that I am saying that this will only happen in 2007, and it is now just the end of August. Work on these things does take a long time, especially if we are to go out and consult with the experts in the field, get feedback, modify and get it out. For example, with chemistry you could not really expect, until the final shape of the course of study was done and the content was done, that groups could start working on how they assess and examine it. The question is: will that course of study be ready to be implemented from the beginning of next year? I suppose I am becoming increasingly concerned that the package will not be there for teachers. As I said, if teachers have to do this, to prepare themselves for future students, they still have to do the very best by the groups of students they are teaching.

Dr Parkin: For example, we do not know what the English paper will look like - the format of the English paper for next year. We have people now who are teaching year 10s, who will be the students starting the new courses of study, but we still do not know what that paper will look like for next year.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Can I just continue with the question about implementation. You have described the situation for us. What would the organisation like to have happen?

Mrs Jackson: In the paper we have proposed that the courses of study that are going to be implemented in 2006 should be fully implemented and that perhaps we should wait until they have been through the two-year cycle, because we must remember that we are looking not at distinct year levels; we are looking at a two-year cycle. Any of the issues that arise during the first year of the cycle can then be used to adapt the future courses of study. That would mean a delay of one year in the greater implementation. When I make that comment, some schools in our association would say yes, they agree, but other schools that are perhaps just moving into years 11 and 12 may say, "Look, we are moving into year 11 in 2007, we don't want to be bothered with two things, we want the new one." It is very hard to give an association point of view. The alternative to that is to make sure that the key issues are sorted out - I am sorry to come back to assessment, but that is one of them - and that the Curriculum Council has sufficient resources and sufficient quality personnel, real

leaders, the sorts of teachers who, in Queensland, would be on those moderation panels, and they exist in Western Australia. We have some wonderful teachers here in all sectors. A way must be found to put everything together. We also must remember what those teachers are teaching about. They have responsibility for year 12 students who have high-stakes exams coming up in November. I guess I am having a dollar each way on this one: that if we cannot put it back by a year, we have to focus on readiness and we have to give the Curriculum Council, which has run on a shoestring budget for the years during which this has been implemented, the resources to make sure that the packages are there for teachers.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Is there an associated issue of financial burden on schools in your sector? Could you tell us about that?

Dr Parkin: If I can respond to that, please. We have two campuses with a primary and secondary school on each. Our English staff this year, in preparation for the new courses of study for next year, have had at least 10 days of release from classes. In addition to that, they have used every day that we would ordinarily have as professional development without students at school - they have used those days as well. That is just for English.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: How many English teachers?

Dr Parkin: That is exactly what I was about to say: probably 16 across the school.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: That is 32 weeks?

Dr Parkin: That is right, and that is simply for English. Of course, as Audrey just said, it is not simply about preparation; it is about sustaining quality of product back at school. When we look at doing that for another 20 courses for next year, I am not sure how we will manage when we are preparing during next year for 2007. I honestly do not know how schools will manage that because, number one, we will all be competing for the pool of relief teachers to come in. There has been talk about having a week here and a week there. It is not ideal to ask teachers to sit and work on something like that in a solid block of a week; it needs to be more spread out than that, because the thinking has evolved that to stay working on the implementation of one of the new courses for 2007 for a whole week means teachers will become a bit stale. It will also affect our counterparts in country areas and so on, where they simply will not have access to people to come in and take relief classes. It will be a huge burden for schools. In our area, we are clustering with some other local schools, like Joondalup Baptist and St Marks, so we will have our own staffs working together in teams, and we will also have people in running sessions rather than repeating that three times. We will have people working in a cluster to try to facilitate that. Country schools will not be able to do that.

The CHAIRMAN: Your association represents some country schools, but I am particularly interested in whether there is any relevance in these changed processes and their impact on your association's independent Aboriginal schools. For those schools that you represent, such as CAPS and the others throughout the network, is there any commentary that comes from that element of your association's responsibilities?

Mrs Jackson: Only one of the Aboriginal independent community schools currently goes through to year 12, and that is the CAPS at Wongatha. CAPS will be severely affected if the current issues that we have already raised with regard to VET are not resolved. This will be a growing problem for other schools as the school exit age is lifted. We are fortunate in Western Australia that we have good cross-sectoral arrangements. In the country our member schools will join with their Catholic and Department of Education counterparts to be part of professional development there. The comment that Glenda made about relief teachers is even more significant. How do you, for example, get sufficient relief teachers in Kalgoorlie to cover all the Kalgoorlie schools so that they can undertake all that professional development? That will be a significant problem. Some of the things that we have commented on may sound as though we have not been heavily involved in this

implementation, but we have. Members of my staff - and I comment particularly on Valerie who has given countless hours to this - have given countless hours to working with schools and we will continue to do so, but we can still see those problems, not only for our sector but also for every sector in Western Australia. That issue of relief teaching is very significant.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: While we are talking about teachers, what effect do you see these changes having on the teacher workforce? Do you see people leaving teaching because they may throw up their hands and say they do not want to do this any more?

[11.20 am]

Mrs Jackson: Some of them may, but maybe that is a good thing. If that is how they feel, maybe it is a good thing, because one thing you need to be a teacher is passion for what you are doing, and if you have not got it, it is not a very good career to be in. I actually do not believe that. I believe that most teachers are motivated by the desire to do their very best for students. I would ask, across all age bands and all subject areas: "Will I be able to do the best for my students in this new structure?"

Dr Parkin: I would agree with that.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: I would like to go back to the situation of less able students. I have tried to understand how a less able student might feel about perhaps never reaching level 4 from kindergarten to year 12; struggling through the system and not quite making even level 4, or eventually getting to level 4, but no further. What do you think the impact will be on at least some less able students of being in mixed-ability classes with brighter kids who are reaching level 7 and 8 while they are still struggling around level 3 or whatever? I cannot quite understand where that student will fit in.

Dr Parkin: I will answer that with an example from my school. We had a number of year 10 students who were disaffected by school. There were behavioural problems, just as I think most of us would have when asked to do something that we are not very good at. Even as adults we tend to mess around and find ways of avoiding doing something we are not very good at. We created a program, called the achievement program, for year 10s. We designed a program that still gives them their literacy and numeracy skills, and some senior science, at the level that year 11s would do. We have structured a program in conjunction with some of the TAFE colleges in which they go out and have a taste of lots of different trades. We supervise that very carefully. We have two staff members who go out and visit the students on site. We are running our own horticulture program at the school, under the auspices of the Murdoch TAFE. Those students are coming back to the school and loving it. It is the first time they have achieved success in an area. But it is more than that; it has changed their whole attitude to school, so they are then progressing in years 11 and 12 to a combination of school and off-the-job training, either at TAFE colleges or at other registered training authorities. They go out one day a week to that. They are also doing structured workplace training, which of course counts towards post-school TAFE entry. Some of them are actually organising to do more of that kind of thing, particularly the structured workplace training, during their holiday periods, so that they are actually gaining wider experience and a good portfolio to be able to go to TAFE and earn their points for TAFE. The reason in telling that story is that these students are no longer disaffected by school. They are actually enjoying school, and once that starts to happen, obviously it can start to make a huge difference. Otherwise we would have, particularly with the changes to the leaving age, a lot of disaffected young men and women who make it very difficult for their colleagues, and obviously for staff, if there is not something at which they are enjoying success.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: What will happen to those students under the new regime?

Dr Parkin: I believe that they will really struggle. Either that or the better students will be affected. If you can imagine the whole range of students sitting in a food science class, for

example. There would be some very capable students who would want to do food science, and who would be working at the highest levels, and then there would be others who currently would be the sorts of students who are doing the catering courses or the hospitality courses. We would have to try to match those.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Are you saying will be the lot of those less able students? Are they going to be judged against the others?

Dr Parkin: Yes, absolutely.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: You are going to have level 8s and those students whom you were describing a moment ago in that program. Where would you see them fitting in?

Dr Parkin: They might not even be achieving level 4, which is supposed to be the minimum. Some of them would not really be able to achieve it in a food science type of course. That is my understanding of that course, which I have not seen, of course.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The catering and hospitality courses that exist now will not exist?

Dr Parkin: No, not in the way they do now.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: That is what I am trying to understand.

Dr Parkin: This was the concern I raised earlier: that wide range of practical courses that those students can currently access will not be accessible. A lot of the students I am talking about are very capable students when it comes to using their hands, but when you ask them to do written work, or to articulate what they have done, they come unstuck. They are often the people who become our tradespeople. They are the people who I feel would be disadvantaged by this system.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: That is what I understand. I want to perhaps repeat what you said. The students we are talking about could under the current system do courses of study, or subjects, or whatever they are, and maybe achieve an A, B or C.

Dr Parkin: Absolutely, yes.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: However, under the new system, they will have less choice. They will be forced into choosing, in the example you have just given, food science, and they may not even achieve the minimum level.

Dr Parkin: That is right; absolutely.

Mrs Gould: The current vocational subjects, like catering, food production and metal fabrication, are probably about level 3, because they are pitched at certificate 1 level at TAFE. That is not the standard certificate, only aligned to level 3, but it is actually lower than a lot of the courses of study.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: If I understand what you said before, the successful students in those current courses have a terrific springboard into the rest of their life because of what they have done at school.

Dr Parkin: Yes, they do.

Mrs Gould: It is because they can achieve higher, whereas now, if they get to level 4, that is as high as they will get, and they will not get any further. It is just not enough for the vocational courses.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: Can I follow up with that example? If the schools were big enough - that gets down to the numbers game - so that you are able to have a number of classes in the same subject -

Dr Parkin: You could stream the classes.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: We could go back to the old way, and you effectively stream them. That might help alleviate that problem, but that, of course, is not possible when you do not have the critical mass to do it, so that would be problematic in country schools.

Dr Parkin: Yes, and even in a bigger school it might be possible for some courses, but not all.

Mrs Jackson: Even if you can stream, the best students will still be level 4, perhaps. They are going to show very little progress through years 11 and 12 to acknowledge what they have achieved. They are going to know, and students always do, that level 8 is the best you can get, whereas now in the structure that we have, you can acknowledge those students through giving As and Bs. If you still have an old-fashioned system in which you give prizes for achievement, one of those students can get the prize for catering, or whatever it is. One of the great outcomes of the McGaw report and the structures we have had in place - I saw this when I was a school principal - was the increase the self-esteem of those students who were doing six wholly school assessed subjects. It did not matter, because they were doing subjects in which they could achieve, and in which the best student would get the same honour as the best student in physics. They felt good about themselves to go on and study further. That is what I believe education should be all about.

Dr Parkin: Just as there has been the medal for the best TAFE-directed studies student. In our school, for example, we have a dux of that area. Everybody knows that that is not the same as being the dux of science, if you like, but it honours the fact that those kids have abilities in certain areas and have achieved well, even excellently.

Mrs D.J. GUISE: We have effectively allowed our schools to celebrate success in the different areas, and the parents welcome that.

[11.30 am]

Mrs Gould: I will make an additional comment. One solution to this, if we stay with the same model, is to come up with a grading structure in each unit. That is not difficult to do. Unit 1A is a lower-level unit. Students who study a 1A unit and who score 4.8 - if the point system is to be used - would receive an A and students who score 4.5 would receive a B. That means that students in a well-organised school in which some students do this really valuable unit could achieve an A. However, students who did a level 3A unit, which is a top-level unit, would require a score of 7.8 to receive an A grade. It is not that difficult. It can be done. The Curriculum Council rejected a similar model when it was proposed last year. After Dr Brendan Nelson's request, it will probably have to be looked at again. That would go some way towards addressing the lack of esteem among those poor students who stay down, but who are doing great things.

Hearing concluded at 11.30 am
