

SECTION B

Consultation and Scrutiny Reporting



B1 Community engagement

The Department values the links that it forms with the community and works to develop, strengthen and broaden this engagement through a wide range of activities as described below.

Community consultation

Government and Non-Government Schools Education Councils

The Government Schools Education Council and the Non-Government Schools Education Council are the peak Ministerial advisory groups in the education sector. These councils provide an opportunity for the community to have an important role in formulating advice to Government on school education policy. The Department provides secretariat support for these councils and their annual reports are annexed to this report.

ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Body

The Department consults with the ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) whenever plans, initiatives or programs are being developed or proposed that will impact on Indigenous students. During 2007, the IECB experienced difficulties recruiting members. This impacted on its ability to undertake tasks outlined in the *IECB Strategic Plan 2005-08*.

During the reporting period the Minister for Education and Training gave the IECB approval to reduce the membership from 17 to nine, comprising three community members and six parents. The Minister also supported the IECB's request to review its terms of reference.

Renewing our schools

During the implementation of the Schools Renewal program community consultation has taken place around a number of key Schools Renewal decisions including:

- four new early childhood schools, catering for students from preschool to year 2, will open in 2009 on existing primary school sites. Consultations have included opportunities to comment on plans for each of the four new schools. The architects designing the renovations have taken comments received into consideration
- amalgamation of all preschools with schools, forming schools catering for students from preschool to year 6 (or P-10)
- establishment of Hawker Collegiate linking Hawker Preschool, Hawker Primary School, Belconnen High School and Hawker College
- amalgamation of Melba High School and Copland College to form Melba-Copland Secondary School
- building of the school at west Belconnen to be opened for the beginning of the 2009 school year. During the design phase of the project, there was extensive consultation including two public information evenings where the plans of the school were presented and discussed.

The Department is committed to making the transition as smooth as possible for those students who will need to move schools. Detailed transition plans that identify each student's individual and academic needs are completed in consultation with their families of students.

Curriculum renewal

The new curriculum framework *Every Chance to Learn* was released on 27 November 2007. The framework was the result of extensive research, development and consultation within the ACT community, notably through representation of parents on the enabling taskforce. The launch of this framework was accompanied by the distribution of a brochure to inform parents and the wider community.

Vocational education and training

In July 2007, the Chief Executive established the Vocational Education and Training Advisory Group (VETAG) to provide expert, independent and strategic advice under the *Training and Tertiary Education Act 2003*. VETAG's responsibility is to determine annual ACT vocational education and training (VET) priorities, and make recommendations to the Chief Executive about system-wide initiatives related to VET. VETAG has an invitational membership of experts with experience across the VET sector.

In November 2007, the Department held its inaugural annual VET consultation forum, *Let's Talk VET*. The forum included information sessions for registered training organisations (RTO), employers and Australian Apprenticeship Centres, and provided the Department with relevant input from business, industry and the community under the terms of the *2005-08 Commonwealth-State Agreement for Skilling Australia's Workforce*. The *Let's Talk VET 2008* consultation forum, held in April 2008, continued the interactive relationship between the ACT Government, industry and stakeholders and was attended by over 200 members of the VET community.

2007 ACT Training Excellence Awards

The ACT Training Excellence Awards ceremony was held on 16 August 2007 at a gala evening attended by 540 leading ACT employers, RTOs, apprentices, trainees and students. The winners represented the ACT at the Australian Training Awards ceremony in Hobart on 8 November 2007. Five student finalists and four organisations made the finals and were among the top three in their categories. The ACT had three national winners including the joint winner of the Stella Axarlis Australian School-based Apprentice of the Year award.

School boards

Every ACT public school has a school board as a way of sharing authority and responsibility with the school community. The Department provided training for school board members in May 2008. During 2007-08, the Department completed

a review of school board procedures and processes and drafted a revised *School Board Manual*. The manual has been circulated for stakeholder comment and will be completed in the next reporting period.

Partnership programs

The Department has a number of specific partnership programs with ACT community groups and leaders who support public education. These include Capital Chemists, ACT Children's Week, the Returned and Services League of Australia (Woden Valley Sub-Branch Incorporated), Country Women's Association, Australian Medical Association - ACT Branch and the Refugee Day Committee, which each provide scholarships for students to complete their education. In addition, Paperchain Book Store, Microsoft and the School Volunteer Program ACT all assist and support public schools.

Such programs are primarily focused at the primary, high school and college levels with limited programs and/or services being directly targeted at preschool programs. Current partnership programs available to preschool programs are generally coordinated in conjunction with the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, such as National Child Protection Week.

Public Education Week: 26 May-1 June 2008

Public Education Week is a partnership between the Australian Education Union (ACT Branch) and the Department. Events, exhibitions and performances were held across Canberra as communities celebrated the excellence of ACT public schools.

A number of school choirs, jazz and concert bands performed in City Walk and the Canberra Centre throughout the week, and exhibitions of student visual artwork were held in public libraries and the Canberra Centre. Other highlights included *Theatresports*, featuring an improvised student theatre at The Street Theatre, and the *Capital Kids: Capital Leaders* student leadership conference, attended by more than 500 primary school students.

Through Back to School Day, which this year extended to the whole of May, former public school students returned to their schools to share their personal stories and life journeys.

Public education seminars

The third in the annual series of ACT Public Education Showcase seminars, featuring noted speakers on education issues, was launched in Public Education Week in May 2008. A large audience attended a presentation by prominent child and adolescent psychologist, Dr Andrew Fuller. The three remaining seminars will be held during the next reporting period.

2007 Adult Learners' Week in the ACT

Adult Learners' Week is an international festival of adult learning held in the first week of September each year. It has been celebrated in Australia since 1995.

In the ACT, the Member for Ginninderra, Ms Mary Porter AM MLA launched Adult Learners' Week 2007. The week was celebrated with over 50 workshops, events and activities taking place, including a dinner to announce the 2007 ACT Adult Learners' Week Awards.

Further to the ACT awards, the Erindale College community education program was the joint winner of the Adult Learning Community of the Year Award at the national Adult Learning Australia awards ceremony, held in Cairns in December 2007. The program was recognised for the innovative strategies used to ensure maximum participation through low course fees achieved through cross program subsidisation. The program has a fine balance between vocational and general, non-accredited courses, as well as those designed to meet special needs within the community.

Consultation on Schools Standards Authority

A formal community consultation process on an ACT School Standards Authority was announced in May 2008. The consultation is seeking community submissions in response to an initial discussion paper issued in February 2008 on teacher registration, and on the establishment and monitoring of standards across our education system. The consultation period commenced on 2 June 2008 and will close on 1 September.

The consultation paper, entitled *High standards in ACT school education*, is available on the Department's website at www.det.act.gov.au.

Responses to the consultation paper, together with feedback obtained through focus groups and workshops, will provide input to help Government make decisions on the establishment of the authority.

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B2 Internal and external scrutiny

Internal scrutiny

An appropriate internal control environment is in place to support the Department's legislative functions, and to provide assurance that its objectives and aims are being achieved. Processes and procedures are in place to ensure an appropriate level of internal scrutiny is maintained.

A number of these mechanisms are reported in more detail elsewhere in this report (refer to Sections C1 Risk Management and Internal Audit and C2 Fraud Prevention).

The Department has a robust planning process in place. Annual business plans link with the Department's strategic objectives set out in the *Strategic Plan 2006-2009*. Outcomes and outputs from these plans are reviewed and monitored. The performance of directors and principals is monitored against performance targets in the plans. The risk management and audit framework that flows from the planning process provides a further level of internal scrutiny, including the identification of major risks faced by the organisation.

Departmental policies are regularly reviewed and updated, and new policies developed, in response to changes in the internal and external environment. A centralised policy register was developed during the year. This allows senior management to monitor the development of new policies and review existing policies. The Department's policy procedures were reviewed during the year, and a *Policy Development Review Manual* drafted to provide assistance to staff with updated procedures. The new policy register and manual enhance the capacity of the Department to provide an appropriate level of internal scrutiny over its policy environment.

During the year, the Department embarked on a major compliance project aimed at ensuring that a framework was in place to assist the Department in meeting its legislative and other obligations. A draft *Compliance Framework* and three-year *Compliance Plan* have been developed and will be circulated for stakeholder consultation. The framework is based on the relevant Australian Standards. The three-year plan provides an action plan and timetable for implementation, and a framework for monitoring, review and reporting on compliance within the Department.

During the year, scrutiny of the Department's legislative obligations continued, with a particular focus on the review of administrative law obligations and the *Territory Records Act 2002*.

External scrutiny

The *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004* and the *Auditor-General Act 1996* provide mechanisms for the external scrutiny of the Department. The former requires the Department's annual report to be provided to the Legislative Assembly within three months after the end of the financial year. The latter provides for an annual audit of the Department's financial statements and financial performance.

The Auditor-General's Office has observer status on the Department's Audit Committee. During the year, it provided regular reports to the Committee, including advice on matters affecting the Department. It also provided advice on the findings of a performance audit and audits into credit card use, hospitality and sponsorship. The Department's Chief Executive's Financial Instructions were updated to incorporate all recommendations.

The Auditor-General commenced two performance audits on the Department during the year. The Department was included in an audit on procedures and practices relating to the *Freedom of Information Act 1989*. It was also included in a second performance audit relating to records management. The audit report on freedom of information is yet to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

The audit report on records management was tabled in the Assembly on 26 June 2008. The audit found that the Department had a well established framework for records management in central office but that this was not yet fully applied to schools. The audit made recommendations with respect to the training of staff and the preservation and storage of records. The Department agreed with the recommendations, and advised that many of the issues had already been identified and were being addressed through the development of a three year records management plan for schools.

The Auditor-General's final audit management report found the Department's financial report and statement of performance for the year ended June 2007 to be well prepared. The Audit Office has assessed the overall control environment of the Department to be strong.

The Auditor-General's report identified two issues that it recommended the Department address. One related to the need to ensure an IT strategic plan was in place, and the second recommended that the Department take steps to develop an appropriate business continuity plan.

In 2007-08, the *Education ICT Business Plan* was finalised and approved, and the Department also commenced work on a new ICT Strategic Plan. The two plans will ensure an alignment of the Department's and InTACT's business plans and strategic goals.

An external consultant was contracted to review and update the Department's business continuity policy and procedures. A draft *Business Continuity Plan* has been completed and will be finalised and tested in the next financial year.

The Department's Governance, Regulation and Risk Directorate coordinates responses to complaints made under the *Ombudsman Act 1989* (ACT) about administrative actions of the Department. No reports were received from the Ombudsman in the reporting period.

A number of senior staff from the Department attended the Ombudsman's 30th Anniversary Seminar in August 2007. Departmental officers also attended an agency contact officers' forum conducted by the Ombudsman's office in April 2008.

The Department is governed by the *Information Privacy Principles* set out under the *Privacy Act 1988* relating to the way in which the Department collects, safeguards, uses and discloses personal information.

Under a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner provides privacy services for ACT government agencies, including conducting audits. The Department's approach to privacy issues was the subject of external scrutiny during the year. An audit of the Department was conducted in February 2008 and included student records and student counselling information. The audit team met with senior departmental officers, visited two schools (one from each school sector) and met with the Student Services Directorate. The Department received the draft audit report at the end of June 2008.

During the year, representatives from a number of external agencies addressed the Department's senior management group, including the Office of Regulatory Services and the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

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B3 Legislative Assembly committee inquiries and reports

The Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People is currently holding inquiries into:

- Vocational education and training and skills shortages
- Annual and financial reports (Education) 2006-2007.

The Committee finalised and tabled two reports during 2007-2008:

- Report 5: *Inquiry into the Eligible Voting Age* (tabled 25 September 2007).
The Government's response to this report was tabled on 12 February 2008. The Department of Justice and Community Safety (JACS) had primary carriage for preparation of the response. Details of recommendations accepted by the Government, for which JACS has responsibility, would appear in that agency's annual report
- Report 6: *Restorative Justice Principles in Youth Settings* – final report (tabled 10 April 2008).

The Government is yet to respond to this report.

In relation to the report on the *Inquiry into the Eligible Voting Age*, the Department has responsibility, or partial responsibility, for five of the committee's recommendations. The Government agreed to recommendations 6, 7 and 10 which are detailed below:

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Minister for Education and Training ensures that accurate and engaging learning materials, that deal with the specific attributes of the ACT political system and ensure all schools actively promote democratic principles and the attributes of active citizenship, be developed for use in all ACT schools.

Action

The new ACT curriculum framework requires all schools to teach about democratic principles and citizenship as these relate both to the Commonwealth and ACT systems of government. As part of the implementation of *Every Chance to Learn*, several resources to support the teaching of civics and citizenship education have been added to the Department's website.

Curriculum executive officers continue to work with schools to create teaching units of work which implement the relevant essential content. During 2008-09, additional sample units of work will be published on the Department's website.

In the ACT, each school determines the precise content of the curriculum taught, in consultation with the school board and the learning community. This allows for varying emphases of civics and citizenship to be delivered, and also means that

the use of specific learning resources and participation in programs is decided at the individual school level.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the ACT Government undertakes to extend the effectiveness of civics education strategies in promoting awareness and confidence in young people of the specific characteristics of the ACT system of democracy.

Action

Schools and curriculum executive officers are creating units of work to specifically deal with the ACT system of democracy, as well as wider Australian systems. A resource from the ACT Electoral Commission, which supports teachers to implement learning about the ACT system of democracy, is also available on the Department's website.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the ACT Electoral Commission, the Legislative Assembly and the Department of Education and Training continue to collaborate in the development and expansion of opportunities for active learning about democracy in the ACT.

Action

Officers from the three organisations communicate regularly to collaboratively plan and implement educational events and programs. Departmental officers regularly circulate relevant materials from the Legislative Assembly and the ACT Electoral Commission, to ensure teachers are aware of education programs and professional learning opportunities.

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B4 Legislative report

The Department is identified against six pieces of legislation in the Administrative Arrangements:

- *Board of Senior Secondary Studies Act 1997*
- *Building and Construction Industry Training Levy Act 1999*
- *Canberra Institute of Technology Act 1987*
- *Education Act 2004*
- *Training and Tertiary Education Act 2003*
- *University of Canberra Act 1989.*

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and the University of Canberra are not part of the administrative unit of the Department of Education and Training. The Chief Executive of the Department has no direct responsibility for the CIT and the University of Canberra, and the Minister has not delegated any powers in respect of the *Canberra Institute of Technology Act 1987* and the *University of Canberra Act 1989*.

Amendments to the above legislation between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008 were as follows:

- *Building and Construction Industry Training Levy Act 1999* – amended by *Building Legislation Amendment Act 2007*– notified 13 September 2007
- *Canberra Institute of Technology Act 1987* – amended by *Canberra Institute of Technology Amendment Act 2007*– notified 24 October 2007.

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