

# Expanding possible futures:

## A review of Education Queensland's policy on the education of gifted students in Queensland schools

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**Queensland  
Government**  
Education Queensland

Queensland the Smart State

# the brief for this project

## The Purpose of the Review

The brief for this Review was to reconsider the Policy framework for gifted education as an instrument for:

- achieving the goals of Queensland State Education 2010 (QSE-2010) particularly the development of a curriculum for the future, and reconceptualising schools as part of a learning society; and
- positioning Education Queensland to contribute to the ‘Smart State’ by preparing students to be active and reflective citizens with a disposition to lifelong learning.

The purpose of the Review is to provide a comprehensive review of the current policy for gifted education, and to align the policy framework with key directions and initiatives of the department arising from QSE-2010.

The key requirements of the Review were to:

- document key research and policy initiatives interstate and internationally;
- ensure the opportunities are provided for focussed statewide consultation and with peak groups;
- document key issues arising from such consultations; and
- provide recommendations for implementation.

The report of the Review addresses the following:

- a summary of policies from other states, samples from overseas, and the location of current Education Queensland policy within these;
- the Queensland policy context, in particular new commitments and policy frameworks such as Queensland State Education 2010, New Basics, Productive Pedagogies, Rich Tasks and Literate Futures;
- a summary of points of debate and controversy evident in the available literature;
- a summary of what was learned from analyses of the consultations;
- key desirable features of a policy on gifted education; and
- recommendations concerning follow up with respect to resources and strategies in the area.

## Context and chronology

### *The policy context of this review*

It is important to consider this review in the complex policy context in which it has taken place. This review of Education Queensland's Policy on gifted education<sup>1</sup> is not motivated by some widespread sense of crisis or general disaffection with current provision, even though, as we document later, there are, in a minority of areas, debates about aspects of gifted education and heated feelings on all possible sides of these debates.

Of more significance are major policy initiatives recently undertaken by Education Queensland as outlined in two key statements, *Queensland State Education 2010* and *Years 1-10 Curriculum Framework*. These initiatives have resulted in a number of major themes that are relevant to any reconsideration and review of the policy governing the education of gifted students. These themes may be briefly summarised in terms of the following emphases:

- on the specific outcomes of students in terms of key learning areas ('Curriculum Frameworks');
- on a futures' orientation to education that focuses on whole-school planning, community analysis and a broad range of new information and communicational technologies ('Literate Futures' Project);
- on providing alternative curricular offerings in the early and middle school years that emphasise engagement with real-tasks through long-term inter-disciplinary project work ('New Basics' Project);
- extra year of schooling at the early years ('Preschool Curriculum Guidelines');
- on developing responsiveness at system, district, school and classroom levels that attends to and capitalises on the diversity of Queensland students; and communities' needs and aspirations ('QSE-2010 Policy Framework');
- on connecting schools to realistic pathways for further education and training ('QSE-2010 Policy Framework'); and
- on the importance of a vibrant and contemporary education system that can meaningfully compete with other non-public providers and systems ('QSE-2010 Policy Framework').

In part, these initiatives are aimed at providing a concerted response to the recent movement away from public education nationally and internationally, and to an accompanying perception in some quarters that public schools offer outmoded and under-resourced provision. Education Queensland's responses have been focused on curricular and professional renewal rather than on the straight upgrading of resource levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that, throughout this document, we refer to the variety of issues, policies and programs relating to the education of gifted and talented students under the general term 'gifted' unless the formal title of a program includes a reference to 'talent'.

## ***The 2001 Senate Inquiry***

In late 2000, the Commonwealth Senate referred to the Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee the need for an inquiry into the education of gifted students. After extensive consultations, and drawing on numerous written submissions, this Committee's report (Collins, 2001) outlined a range of conclusions relevant to this review, including the following.

- The educational needs of gifted students are not adequately met by current provisions.
- Debates centre on whether provision should be addressed through the “mainstream comprehensive classroom” or “in ability grouped settings” (xiii).
- There is a need for enhanced teacher preparation in this area.
- Research has indicated that many gifted students demonstrate “underachievement and demotivation” (p. xiii).

The Committee also made recommendations generally endorsing the need for differentiated curriculum provision, along with the need for opportunities for accelerated progression through the school years. It also pointed to the need for more research into the effects of ability grouping, selective schooling and the preparation of teachers. While the Committee considered the extensive debate surrounding the definition of ‘giftedness’, it drew attention to the need to act with some urgency on the matter of provision rather than to wait until such debates have been resolved: “Lack of agreement on definitions does not justify ignoring the needs of gifted children” (p. 18).

## ***Gifted Education in Queensland: A brief history***

The recent history of provision for the education of gifted students in Queensland schools can be summarised in the following terms:

- In the early 1980s, there was a growing acceptance of, and interest in, expanding ideas relating to giftedness, resulting in the establishment of a Standing Committee charged with producing the first policy document on gifted education for use in Queensland public schools.
- In 1985, this policy document, *The Education of the Gifted in Queensland State Schools*, was released.
- From 1988 to 1991 a range of initiatives were put in place by the Department of Education to assist schools and students.
- One outcome of these initiatives was that, in 1989, consultant positions in gifted education were created by the Queensland Department of Education in most regions across the state, supported by a Co-ordinator in the Department's head office.
- Individuals filling these positions were trained and located in districts.
- Their role was to advise on mainstream classroom enrichment programs and to advise on the establishment of occasional pull-out provision.

- These consultant positions were formally disestablished in 1992, and the Co-ordinator's role was re-focused on policy development rather than on resource or on personnel co-ordination. In this period, following extensive consultation with input from school and regional personnel, state and non-state systems, universities and community groups, the current Policy Statement on the Education of Gifted Students in Queensland Schools was released. (See Department of Education Manual CS-07: [http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/doem/currstu/cs-07000/sections/preface .htm#accountabilities.](http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/doem/currstu/cs-07000/sections/preface.htm#accountabilities.))
- From that time until 1996, provision for gifted students was made through access to Commonwealth targeted programs under the National Equity Programs for Schools (Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training, Gifted and Talented Component). These programs included Zigzag, Cygnet and Unicorn.
- These targeted programs resulted in enhanced production and dissemination of models of identification of gifted students, curriculum development and professional development materials for state-wide application.
- In 1996, the Commonwealth withdrew this funding, and responsibility for gifted education moved into the Queensland Department of Education's GATE initiative (Gifted and Talented Education), with three funded components: publicity, school grants, and the Focus Schools network. The first two of these components enjoyed only a short term of priority support.
- The Standing Committee, by this time renamed the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gifted and Talented Education, which had been established to facilitate the exchange of information between educators, stakeholders and senior policy forums in Education Queensland, was disbanded in 1998.
- Over the course of 1997 through 1999, eight schools became GATE Focus Schools, whose major purposes were to model best practice in Gifted and Talented Education, to develop an archive of material and human resources adequate to the enhancement of this practice, and to provide other Queensland schools with enhanced provision for gifted students through systematic outreach programs. In 2001, seven of these Focus Schools continued as Learning Development Centres – Gifted and Talented . One additional school joined this LDC system in early 2002 restoring the complement of eight schools.
- In addition to the external review by Imison (2001), summarised below, two internal reviews of gifted education, in 1999 and 2000, were undertaken by Education Queensland. These reviews resulted in some uncertainties in schools concerning the continuity of ongoing programs, and the temporary withholding of resources from those programs.

Even this brief history indicates that:

1. at a system level, the interest, commitment and support from central policy making bodies within Education Queensland appears to have been patchy and intermittent;

2. there has been fragmented, uneven provision for gifted students in Queensland state schools;
3. the frequency of recent reviews of the area suggests significant system-level uncertainty surrounding the placement and continuity of the education of gifted students; and
4. this uncertainty has also led to the less than optimal accumulation of institutional policy memory and professional capacity.

The current Education Queensland Policy Statement on the Education of Gifted Students in Queensland Schools and the supplementary Resource Document were formulated in 1992 and distributed in 1993. The current Policy opens with the statement that the provision by schools and regions of “appropriate services to assist the development of their potential,” and the planning and co-ordination necessary to achieve that goal are departmental requirements.

A number of changes have occurred in the area and in educational provision and policy in the intervening years. Some analytic observations can be made about this Policy from a contemporary perspective. First, not all of the various terms used in the Policy to describe gifted students are still in general use in the field, and detract from the consistency of the Policy’s message. As one of our technical advisors pointed out,

this varied usage may “provide ammunition for those who are opposed to the concept of giftedness.” Second, professional understandings about the nature of giftedness have evolved in recent years, in particular the notion of varied rates in the development of giftedness and the significance of environmental supports. In this respect, the Policy clearly mentions but does not emphasise the need for a repertoire of options in the provision of learning experiences for gifted students. Third, the Policy does not emphasise sufficiently the primary role of teachers in the identification of gifted students. Having said that, as we outline later, many of the participants in this project saw few problems with the Policy Statement itself, and observed that the supplementary documents and the guidelines for implementation were the bases for short-falls in practice.

In my own school it was a wonderful, supportive document. I was very much in favour of it when it first came out. I loved its succinctness, its objectives were fair, I thought that the options it gave me supported my own philosophy and also gave me some credibility. When staff or other principals would question me, I could quote something out of there especially about acceleration where there was a widespread belief that that was not possible ... I have to say that the resource document soon became the most used part of it, because it did elaborate and expand on strategies and ideas and theories that were behind all of this.

*Primary School Principal*

## ***The Imison Report***

In terms of the more immediate context for this report, in early 2001, Education Queensland received a report on the efficacy of its target schools for Gifted and Talented Education – the ‘Learning Development Centres, Gifted and Talented’. This report, presented by Mr K. Imison, recommended, among other things, that the current Education Queensland policy governing the education of gifted students be reviewed by an independent team of consultants. That recommendation was the immediate stimulus for the current Review.

The central focus of the Imison Report was the extent to which the Focus Schools had achieved their purposes. Imison was also charged with providing more general guidelines for the future development of gifted education in Queensland state schools. After visiting the Learning Development Centres, Gifted and Talented, and interviewing staff and parents, Imison came to the following general conclusions:

- The Focus Schools had been “extremely successful” in providing quality educational provision to gifted students, in the enhancement of educational provision for all students in the schools, and in their outreach function.
- More collaboration, co-ordination and work-up time was needed to optimise the potential of the work of the Focus Schools.
- There are ongoing problems with the terminology of ‘gifted education,’ including problems in community and public perception, and problems of differentiation among various possible categories of students.
- There is a sense among some educators and some community members that provisions for gifted students have received substantially less attention than other groups of students with special needs, to the point where gifted students may appear a neglected special group.
- More generally, some schools appear to regard the targeted education of gifted students as a matter of institutional choice rather than part of core business.

The current report draws on further materials made available by Imison in subsequent interviews in which he elaborated on aspects of his review and recommendations. References to these materials and other relevant aspects of the Imison Report are made in the course of this report.

## **Starting points for a reconsideration of gifted education**

A key issue in formulating policy relates to the status of the concept of ‘giftedness’. As we discuss in following sections, there is a spectrum of approaches that can be taken in discussion and debate in this area, the poles of which have distinctive implications for policy and educational provision. The first is to consider the term ‘gifted’ to refer to a category of students that is comparable to the status of other special needs or target categories, such as the variety of students labelled Learning Disabled, Sensory Impaired, English-Second-Language,

and so on. This locates questions about provision for gifted education within a tradition of Special Education, thereby bringing with it theoretical and professional apparatuses (assumptions and approaches) based on a particular history of research and teaching techniques. The Senate Inquiry into the education of gifted students explicitly recommended this perspective (Collins, 2001):

Special needs (giftedness) should be seen in the same light as social needs (intellectual impairment) or special needs (physical disabilities). Policy documents should make this clear (p. xiv).

In these terms, discussions concerning gifted students deal with prototypical performance profiles, labels or patterns of observable behaviours that constitute recognisable attributes of a definable group, members of which to be selected for special intervention.

A contrasting approach views the issue from within a curriculum-provision framework, drawing on a more varied tradition of research and professional practice, a distinct set of ideas about curriculum in schools and classrooms, and a focus on specific matters of pedagogy.

In working through some of the debates in the research literature (as we summarise in the Chapter 2), we find this fundamental distinction at the heart of many contestations about gifted education. It is also at the heart of many policy decisions and more specific organisational decisions about institutional, structural implementation that may enhance the education of students considered gifted, however they may be defined or identified.

It is important that these end points on the spectrum of approaches not be taken to be mutually exclusive options for policy and practice. Both offer the education of gifted students significant opportunities in their school learning and offer educators a multi-faceted repertoires of approaches to identification and provision.

Debates relate to varying understandings of the relationship between giftedness and high achievement. Generally high achievers are those students who have adapted to the demands of schooling and have adopted successful approaches to learning within that environment. Other students may be seen to have distinctive capabilities that are potentially relevant to the goals of schooling but who might, for a variety of reasons struggle or drop out. In some cases, such students may demonstrate approaches to learning that are qualitatively different from those of their classmates or from those imagined or stipulated by curricular and syllabus programs. These debates are revisited later in this Report.

## **Design of the Review**

This Review of Education Queensland's Policy for Gifted Education was undertaken over a period of about six months. The Review Team visited 22

Education Queensland sites (indicated in the Figure below), including all designated Learning and Development Centres, Gifted and Talented, schools and district offices, sites across a range of socio-economic and geographical settings, and sites serving a range of ethnic and linguistic minority students. Extensive discussions were held with key staff to ascertain the impact of policy and to canvass ways of enhancing existing policy and practices. These discussions were audiotaped. Printed materials were also provided by a number of schools visited.

In addition, a number of public meetings were held to which parents, educators from schools not visited, and other community members could attend. These meetings were advertised, and the proceedings of these consultation meetings were audiotaped. All audiotaped material was transcribed, coded and categorised. Calls for submissions were placed in local and state newspapers and opportunities were taken to disseminate information about the review through news media.

Where feasible, data were collected by at least two members of the review team to enable sharing of information and corroboration of assertions made by interviewees. Transcripts of interviews were read by all members of the committee and the team met face to face on numerous occasions to debate interpretations of the data emerging from the interviews. Key themes emerging through the data were identified and the strength of these themes noted by the frequency of comments and assertions made in relation to those themes and sub themes. Issues and practicalities were also discussed with senior officers of Education Queensland at critical points in the preparation of the report to confirm the feasibility of possible processes.

A technical reference group and a stakeholder group were identified as critical components of this project in order to provide input into the data collection and analysis process and hence provide a form of consensual validation. The stakeholder group represented a wide range of peak bodies with interests in gifted education or teaching. Representatives of these bodies were provided with insights into the initial interpretations of data and assertions that the committee proposed. Extended discussions enabled the clarification of issues and alerted the committee to various perspectives. They were also invited to provide feedback on the draft report and recommendations, an offer taken up by five groups. In addition, a technical reference group whose members are prominent in the field of gifted education and special education provided expert input into the project, including input into the planning, process of data collection and analysis.

## **Preview of this report**

In the sections that follow, we first present a selective review of the relevant research literature, with a particular focus on those theories and empirical findings that have direct bearing or strong implications for effective policy. We then consider a variety of policy perspectives from other Australian states, and from

other countries. This is important because any policy that is to have public and professional credibility needs to be based on a coherent and contemporary perspective on the educational work it governs and informs, particularly in the area of gifted education, a field long characterised by active debate.

We then turn to a brief summary of the major themes and findings from our consultations, using a set of headings that we found best captures the lines of discussion those consultations afforded: the *culture* of gifted education, the *context* of current and preferred provision, and the *capability* of the system, the schools and the teachers to deliver enhanced provision. Finally, we give directions for policy development in this area, including recommendations and possible timelines for the ongoing enhancement of gifted education in Queensland.



# Selective review of relevant literature

A policy review involves developing awareness of the important ideas and studies that characterise the current state of a field. These ideas and studies are significant aspects of the context of a review. A policy needs to be, and be seen to be contemporary in its orientation and thus in what it affords practitioners. To that end, this section provides an overview of some of the ideas and key studies that have given shape to the field of gifted education. We begin by outlining the significant theoretical frameworks that currently contest this field, noting that many debates concerning giftedness have been centred on developing views of intellectual functioning; we then proceed to a brief discussion of some major studies on which the field has drawn in recent times; and we conclude with a summary of what this literature would suggest are key ideas on which the revision of policy can be based.

## Theoretical frameworks

### *Emerging notions of intelligence*

Many approaches to gifted education have drawn together the constructs of intelligence, creativity and giftedness, while others have focused on teasing them apart. Ideas about intelligent functioning are, therefore, a reasonable place to start. Serious theoretical treatment of intelligent functioning began with a unitary conception, general intelligence. This idea – termed *g* – has served as the major representation of intellectual ability during most of the twentieth century, beginning with the work of Binet (1902) in France, Spearman (1927) in England and Terman (1916) in the United States (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, p. 280). From the 1950's through to the 1970's, Guilford, Cattell and others attempted to identify specific factors of intelligence, but the concept of general intelligence, represented by the Intelligence Quotient continued to underlie these efforts. However, over the last two decades, the work of Carroll, Sternberg, Gagné, and Gardner has dominated the new analytical approach to human cognition. In an attempt to map the terrain of human intelligence, each has given a distinctive understanding of the intellectual processes underlying the general mental operation called 'intelligence.' Their work has been influential in promoting the concept of multiple aptitudes, talents and abilities. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the major positions.

**Table 2.1: An overview of some of the major approaches to intellectual functioning**

Theorist	Key ideas	Key references
<p>Terman, Spearman, Spencer, Galton, Thurstone, Cattell, Carroll</p> <p><i>g and sub-g models</i></p>	<p>Multi-strata theories of intelligence in which <i>g</i> or general intelligence predisposes all intellectual functioning. Subsets include Crystallised and Fluid Intelligence – that is, acquired versus spontaneous capabilities; verbal and spatial abilities, and various other second-order constructs, all considered to be governed by or expressions of General Intelligence.</p>	<p>Terman (1925) Spencer (1899) Galton (1883) Cattell (1963) Cattell &amp; Horn, (1978) Carroll (1996) Spearman (1904) (1927)</p>
<p>Sternberg</p> <p><i>Triarchic Theory of Intelligence</i></p>	<p>Posits three subtheories designated as the context, two-facet and component theories. The context subtheory refers to the culture-specificity of intelligence. The two-facet subtheory bridges assumptions regarding thought, problem-solving, knowledge and experience. Finally, the component sub-theory differentiates among, performance components, meta-components and knowledge acquisition components.</p>	<p>Sternberg (1985; 1998) Ziegler &amp; Heller, (2000)</p>
<p>Gagné</p> <p><i>Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT)</i></p>	<p>Recognises gifts as the untrained and spontaneous natural abilities of an individual, and talents as the transformation of these predispositions into the well-trained and systematic characteristics of a particular field of human activity or performance. These fields can be diverse and the valuing of these talents is based on cultural values, beliefs and traditions. By acknowledging that the process of talent development only manifests itself when individuals engage in systematic learning, preparation and practice Gagné’s DMGT presents us with a possible understanding of the issue of underachievement amongst the gifted. Furthermore, it affirms the significance of intra-personal and environmental catalysts - the developmental aspect of the concept.</p>	<p>Gagné (1983, 1985, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2000)</p>
<p>Guilford, Tannenbaum</p> <p><i>Intellect and creativity</i></p>	<p>Expands the concept of giftedness through reference to creativity as a dimension of precocious development; creativity and intelligence are complementary components of cognitive activity that together support complex problem solving.</p>	<p>Guilford (1967) Tannenbaum (2000)</p>

These approaches have provided guides to curriculum and instruction and helped to broaden conceptions of the component abilities of intelligence. Debates over IQ-based definitions of intelligence continue, but there is more widespread acceptance that intelligence needs to be considered multidimensional, and informed by immediate social context and cultural values and mores. So the movement has been from single-factor IQ to multiple intelligences, whereby intelligent behaviour is seen as responsiveness to socio-cultural conditions and challenges. In part, this movement reflects incursions from cross-cultural psychology and education into what was traditionally a field dominated by psychometrics and educational measurement approaches.

### **Giftedness**

As Sternberg and Davidson (1986) described it, giftedness “is what one society or another wants it to be, and hence its conceptualization can change over time and place” (cited in Mönks et al, 2000, p. 842). More specifically, Tannenbaum (1989) emphasised that both the recognition and contents of exceptionality need to have a receptive *Zeitgeist* – a particular spirit of the times – that societies are at points in their histories where it is useful or important to appreciate, value and recognise exceptional performance of whatever sort – ‘gifts’ and ‘talents’ – and that it is the form of that usefulness that will give shape to what is taken to constitute the contents of that exceptionality. Hence, any set of characteristics or definitions that we might use to identify these gifts and talents will be social constructs. Applied to schooling, the argument is that for students to be recognised as capable of achieving desired performance and becoming producers of new valued knowledge, certain conditions are necessary. The argument also includes a recognition that identifying students who may contribute in these ways relies on a broad notion of intellectual functioning and a range of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Educational practices exist within a cultural context. In an egalitarian society the term ‘gifted’ has sometimes connoted an elitist educational philosophy (Boag, 1990; Goldberg, 1981). Fetterman (1988) regarded the tension between excellence and egalitarianism to be a dilemma experienced on a world-wide scale and for many years. For example, at the commencement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Australia was proclaimed to be the paradise of mediocrity and the grave of genius (NSW Attorney General, 1901, cited in Barcan, 1983). Gross (1993) suggested that these extreme egalitarianism attitudes have their origins in the country’s beginnings. She accounted for the general resentment and distrust of the intellectually gifted and the opposition of equity and excellence as the consequence of an equation of intellectual giftedness with social and economic privilege:

Many Australians view high intellectual ability as an inherited, and therefore unmerited, passport to wealth and status through success in school and access to higher-level employment (p. 45).

Australia in the 1980s and 1990s experienced a period of political and educational concern for issues of equity, particularly with regard to the special needs of Indigenous students, girls, students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those who resided in remote areas. Braggett and Moltzen (2000) reported that in such a prevailing social climate more extended provision came to be seen to be tantamount to unwarranted privilege (p. 781). As an example, in the words of a former Australian Teachers' Federation President Di Foggo, "we're not 'anti' the gifted – just the allocation of resources to them" (Boag, 1990, p. 49).

More recently, the Australian Education Unions (AEU) have made a fuller view in its *Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Reference Committee Inquiry into the Education of Gifted Children*, February 2001, the AEU concluded:

"The AEU therefore believes that there is considerable evidence to support its view that:

- it should not be automatically assumed that specific programs for the "gifted" work to their advantage;
- such programs may work to the disadvantage of both those students in the programs and those not in the programs;
- the lobby for special programs for gifted students has not been driven by credible research, and that much of the research points against selective programs;
- there is the danger that the substantial lobby that has developed for gifted students will lead to a misdirection of resources to them rather than a to more individualized instruction.

The AEU therefore urges the Senate in its report to set the education of gifted students in the context of heterogeneous groupings for learning purposes and opposes streaming and other selective mechanisms and to suggest measures which encourage greater individualization of schooling catering to the needs of all students rather than a selected few."

Braggett and Moltzen (2000) argued that these attitudes, are based on an outmoded concept of giftedness in that they assume that ability is innate, fixed in quantity and deserving of provision in special classes or schools (p. 781). They also took such attitudes to assume that students labelled 'gifted' have a head start denied to others and that they are the 'lucky' ones while the rest suffer disadvantage by comparison (Braggett, 1994).

## *Definitions of giftedness*

A basic problem in building a theory about giftedness is that it is a multifaceted phenomenon, the nature of which is still at issue. Consequently, there is no one definition of 'gifted', 'talented' or 'giftedness' that is universally accepted. Common uses of the terms even among experts and advocates remain ambiguous and inconsistent. The following selection provides a brief illustrative summary of several prominent definitions of giftedness that have impacted upon identification methods and programming practices around the world.

The Marland *Report to the Congress of the United States* (Marland, 1972) defined giftedness in the following broad terms:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realise their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential abilities or aptitudes, singly or in combination:

- general intellectual aptitude;
- specific academic aptitude;
- creative and productive thinking;
- leadership ability;
- visual and performing arts aptitude; and/or
- psychomotor ability.

This definition recognised not only high general intelligence but 'gifts' in specific academic areas and in the arts. It further called attention to creative, leadership and psychomotor gifts and talents. Finally, by including "demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability," it aimed to take underachieving students into serious consideration.

Renzulli's Three-Ring Model (1986) of giftedness highlights the dynamic interaction among three basic clusters of human traits – these clusters being above average general ability, high levels of creativity and high levels of task commitment. The model goes on to emphasise that the 'gifted' are "those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance" (cited in Davis & Rimm, 1998). In particular, Renzulli's model aimed to draw attention to the developmental nature of behaviours such as creativity and task commitment.

Gagné's *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT)*; 1983, 1985, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, & 2000) is used as a framework for gifted education in many

states of Australia and in other countries. It takes 'gifts' to be the untrained and spontaneous natural abilities of an individual, and 'talents' as the transformation of these predispositions into the well-trained and systematic characteristics relating to a particular field of human activity or performance. These fields are seen as diverse, and whether or not these talents are valued is based on cultural values, beliefs and traditions. By acknowledging that the process of talent development manifests itself only when individuals engage in systematic learning, preparation and practice, Gagné's DMGT presents a way of understanding underachievement among the otherwise apparently gifted students. Furthermore, it affirms the significance of intra-personal and environmental catalysts.

### *Theorising the characteristics of gifted students*

Even though students differ in physical, intellectual, affective, and behavioural traits, researchers have aimed to document particular characteristics of 'gifted students' (e.g., Silverman, 1997; Tannenbaum, 1992). A recurring issue in gifted education relates to teachers' and parents' abilities to identify behaviours which in some way are purported to indicate giftedness. Davis and Rimm (1998) provided an extensive list of possible characteristics: high levels of attention to environmental stimuli, extraordinary memory and advanced language skills. Further research also indicates other characteristics frequently believed to characterise gifted students such as a diminished need for sleep, intense curiosity and advanced progression through developmental milestones.

The research considering the social-emotional characteristics of gifted students highlights needs associated with:

- the experience of asynchronous development (Silverman, 1993);
- a tendency towards perfectionism which can result in excessive self-criticism (Adderholt-Elliot, 1987 and Webb, Mackstroth & Tolan, 1982 cited in Coleman & Cross, 2000);
- multipotentiality, or the way in which some students may show great promise and interest in numerous areas (Silverman, 1993).

Similarly some learners are taken to develop problems when their educational needs are not met. Specifically, academic underachievement or behavioural problems appear to result from unresponsive classroom practices. The findings indicate that guidance and support by experienced and flexible personnel are important in responding to these socio-emotional needs and in assisting families to cope with the special issues such as career planning that often accompany having a gifted student.

## Empirical studies

There is now a large corpus of research in the area of gifted education (e.g., as summarised in Mönks et al 2000). Here our aim is to provide only a brief glimpse of some of the major studies that have shaped this field, in particular with a focus on those that may inform policy development. The headings we use to organise this section are: identification issues, special provisions (including acceleration, enrichment and extension programs), and teacher preparation and development.

### *Identification of gifted students*

Empirical research on identification strategies suggests that procedures relate directly to the particular definition that is in operation. Specifically, with the adoption of more pluralist definitions practitioners are currently “relying more on student performance and products” (Mönks, Heller & Passow, 2002, p. 845). Another significant development involves designing “environments or settings which provide opportunities for a larger number of students to engage in a self-identification process by participating in enrichment activities” (p. 845). A concern also exists in the research literature that identification procedures have failed to identify gifted students in special populations such as among Indigenous communities, socio-economically disadvantaged communities, ethnic minorities and communities that do not have English (or the relevant dominant language) among their home language/s. This concern continues to represent a major obstacle in the development of policy and practice in gifted education; in spite of assertions in the professional literature and in many policy statements (including that of Education Queensland), little research has been directed to the issue of identification in disadvantaged and minority settings. A notable exception is the work of Gibson (1997) on the identification of gifted aboriginal students that drew upon pioneering studies of Frasier (1987) in Georgia.

Current theorising indicates that identification involves:

- the design and employment of a combination of identification procedures;
- less reliance on single tests;
- more reliance on self-identification; and
- an increased use of enriched curriculum opportunities that allow information about a student to be gathered from multiple sources over an extended period of time.

### *Provisions for gifted students: Acceleration, enrichment and extension*

The implications of failing to provide an effective educational program for gifted students have been listed in the Senate Inquiry into gifted education (Collins, 2001). Numerous submissions noted problems associated with gifted children who were not adequately challenged, including depression, behavioural problems, social isolation, underachievement, dropping out of school, ability masking and low-esteem.

The following examples of studies provide a view of the scope of systemic level provision for gifted students aimed at overcoming these problems. For instance, 200 elementary and secondary schools throughout the US are currently collaborating with business, school systems and professional organisations, coordinated by the National Research Center on the Gifted, to design and implement theory driven qualitative and quantitative research (Tannenbaum, 2000). Additionally research has been conducted for over thirty years into the experiences of mathematically gifted students through the *Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY)* (Lubinski, Benbow & Morelock, 2000). Other significant longitudinal research projects are currently exploring the effectiveness of different approaches to targeted provision (e.g., Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell & Goldberg, 1994).

At the school level, a number of implementation models advocate a focus on either enrichment or acceleration. These include the Schoolwide Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli & Reis, 2000), the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts, 1991), the Purdue Three-stage Enrichment Model (Davis & Rimm, 1998), and the Structure of Intellect Model (Meeker & Meeker, 1986). It is difficult to find substantial and critical research that evaluates the effectiveness of many in-class practices, such as curriculum differentiation, due to the complexity and multiplicity of approaches. Nevertheless, several key researchers have explored strategies to modify curriculum in ways that address the gifted student in the regular classroom (Maker & Neilson, 1995, Tomlinson, 1995; Westberg & Archambault, 1997). In synthesising their research they advocate attention to: content - what is being taught; process - how it is being taught; and product - tangible and valid outcomes or products of learning.

In contrast, clearer directions for implementation are available from the extensive research that has been conducted on the practice of ability grouping (Kulik & Kulik, 2000; Rogers, 2001). A wider range of findings informs the question of what constitutes effective schooling experiences for gifted students. Mönks and others (2000) identified twenty different models for designing programs in the US. Many of these programs have been criticised because they “fail to deal with the total curricular experience and usually consider only one aspect of instruction and learning” (p. 848). While some programs have been empirically and rigorously evaluated, many have not. On the other hand, some schools provide programs that aim to meet the needs of gifted students without explicitly formulating a gifted program. Mönks and others have described such programs as ‘hidden’ approaches (p. 848). Specifically, they suggested that programs and schools based on Montessori education enact the core principles of gifted education in that their approaches to curriculum are designed so that “the level and pace of individual ability determines the content and speed of the individual student” (p. 848). Other innovations have involved challenging age-graded classes. One such Northern

European initiative is the Jena Plan schools, modelled on a multi-age school that aimed to foster individualised achievement through ability grouping, independent as well as group learning, cooperative learning, and social learning and progression according to individual ability and pace (Mönks & Mason, 2000). Limited research into these organisational models (Lloyd, 1999), coupled with anecdotal evidence suggests that younger gifted students' are provided with opportunities to interact with older students, increasing their levels of learning. Multi-age schools, it has been argued, also lend themselves to the individualisation of learning and to a greater opportunity for the teacher to identify the needs of the learner. Furthermore, all students are seen to have the freedom to pursue interests and the opportunity to expand their knowledge in creative ways.

It is important to note that there now seems a substantial corpus of empirical research conducted over the last sixty years that attests to the value, for intellectually gifted students, of acceleration (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Gross 1993; Rogers, 2001; Southern, Jones & Stanley, 1993; Van Tassel-Baska, 1992; Kulik & Kulik, 1984) and ability grouping (Feldhusen & Moon, 1992; Kulik & Kulik, 1987; Rogers & Span, 1993). On the latter point what appears to be emerging most recently in the literature is a consensus that the issue is not simply one of ability grouping versus no grouping, but rather of what kinds of grouping, and how other elements of curriculum and instruction are integrated to foster optimal learning for all students, including those identified as gifted. Early entry to school, although a contentious issue, is supported by researchers in gifted education. A review of research in this area has already been undertaken for Education Queensland (Tayler, Diezmann, Lennox, Perry, & Watters 1999). Further, the research suggests that students need to alternate learning experiences engaged in with their intellectual and creative peers with those undertaken with a broader mix of learners (Tannenbaum, 1998). The impact of ability grouping on students' social emotional states is an area of active research and debate (Gross, 1997).

In analysing the variety of curriculum development models available, VanTassel-Baska (2000) has identified two broad approaches. The first she described as a "design down" model, based on acceleration principles in which curriculum processes are "speeded up and shortened" for gifted students. The second approach draws on notions of enrichment and addresses a broader conception of giftedness, taking into account creativity and motivation. This second approach emphasises "critical thinking skills and creative problem solving as central to the learning enterprise, with content choices being more incidental" (VanTassel-Baska, 2000, p. 348). She identified six models that research suggests to be effective with gifted students. While acknowledging that some of the research used to support most curriculum models is not compelling, she nevertheless argued that, on balance, curriculum models that adopt an accelerative approach are more effective in achieving measurable outcomes. These tend to provide scope for students gifted in

traditional areas of language, mathematics, science and the arts but may well not cope with developing leadership and the aesthetic or affective learning.

Braggett (1997) has suggested how schools can exhibit increased flexibility in provision of education for gifted students through consideration of the following seven issues:

- appropriate speed of teaching and learning;
- the quality of cognitive processes entailed in the learning;
- enrichment and extension work;
- the development of personal autonomy;
- the multiplicity of intelligent functioning;
- the significance of deductive thinking; and
- student involvement in social change.

Acceleration is taken to refer to the process whereby students experience curriculum content at an earlier age, in less time or at a more rapid pace than conventionally indicated by syllabus and curricular guidelines. Braggett and Moltzen (2000) have noted that all Australian states and territories specifically name acceleration as one of a possible combination of strategies that can adequately provide for the education of gifted students. Acceleration assumes several forms:

- early entry of children to formal schooling, secondary school or tertiary education;
- ability groupings within a class;
- vertical and family groupings;
- telescoping the curriculum to allow exemption from knowledge and skills already demonstrated;
- placement in a specific subject area at a higher year level within a classroom, within a school, across primary school and secondary school or across a secondary school and a post-secondary institution;
- year skipping or placement at a higher year level; or
- whole group acceleration, where a whole class is provided with fast-paced learning (e.g., Department of education, Western Australia).

Braggett and Moltzen, (2000) claimed that subject acceleration is more widespread in Australian schools than grade skipping. They go on to explicate how subject acceleration can occur in vertically organised classes, in classrooms where teachers encourage students to work at their own pace, or when individual programs are devised (p. 787). Braggett and Moltzen (2000) concluded that, despite the research evidence in support of accelerative practices, there is still considerable opposition to it in individual schools (p. 788).

Terminologies such as ‘enrichment’ and ‘extension’ describe provisioning initiatives that are seen to involve students’ experiencing curriculum concepts in greater depth and breadth, incorporating a range of implementations, at different levels, for different purposes. Interpretations include a spectrum of initiatives, at one extreme represented by extracurricular activities such as clubs, competitions, use of mentors, and field-trips, and at the other by integrated special classes, cluster groups and multi-age approaches. Braggett and Moltzen (2000, p. 788) maintained that “enrichment is the most widely used strategy across Australia in providing for gifted students”. They go on to suggest, however, that the purposes of enrichment and the target group for whom it is intended are often not clear in the implementation.

### *Skills for teachers of gifted students*

Feldhusen (1997a, cited in Davis & Rimm, 1998, p. 40) summarised the characteristics of effective teaching of gifted students as entailing the development of flexible programs, respect for individuality and creativity, and innovativeness. He observed that the characteristics of good teachers of gifted students are “virtues that should characterize all teachers” (p. 40).

The research summarised above indicates that there are specific sets of skills that allow the identification of gifted students and the development of effective teaching and counselling practices to suit these students. The use of more specialised or experienced teaching staff taking responsibility for different aspects of the management of gifted students has been shown to be effective. These may include classroom teachers, counsellors, guidance officers, learning support teachers or curriculum coordinators. However, one conclusion is that all school staff need to be made aware of the nature and needs of gifted students if a whole-school approach is to be successful (Landrum, 2000).

As part of her submission to the recent Senate inquiry into the education of gifted children, McCann (2000, p. 9) described how most teachers are not well trained in the techniques of identifying gifted students and differentiating the curriculum. She went on to describe how, without specific training, many teachers simply aim to provide more work or harder work, rather than differentiating their provision on the basis of more detailed analysis.

Reflecting on research and education of gifted students at the beginning of this century, Mönks and others (2000, p. 846) noted that more appropriate teacher training is imperative. This conclusion is reiterated in the Australian context by in work of Braggett and Moltzen (2000, p. 794), who argued that considerable attention needs to be focused on regular classroom teachers and their ability to cope with an extended range of abilities in the classroom.

## Conclusions from the theoretical, research and professional literature

1. There is a range of theoretically-grounded strategies that have been shown to have positive effects on the learning of students who are already familiar with key concepts, who may develop these understandings more rapidly than the syllabus implies, or who may think in different and novel ways about these concepts and their combinations.
2. Systemic and whole-school, structural support are important features of effective provision. Schools offering effective provision incorporate their commitments to achieving minimal standards for students into an open-ended learning environment in which learning is unmoored from chronological age and from the parameters of syllabus scope, sequence and tempo. Effective programming involves relationships between school administrators, teachers, communities and cultural patterns of practice and expectation.
3. Teachers' beliefs about the nature of knowledge and their understandings about how, when and why students learn are key components of effective provision. In less productive environments, these beliefs have been shown to include, among other things, beliefs about gifted students as 'school-smart,' as teacher-pleasers, or as learners who progress through the syllabus in tune with its pre-set scope, sequence and tempo. Current approaches to human abilities would indicate that operating within a notion of the 'average year  $n$  student' creates for many students more problems than it solves. More productive and flexible approaches are characterised by the potential for acceleration, differentiation, extension and enrichment activities of various kinds, aiming at all times at responsiveness in planning and organising learning experiences.
4. The terminology that has developed in the field has created some problems with the mainstream recognition of giftedness as a pedagogically relevant issue. Gallagher (1991), for instance, concluded that it is time to change this terminology because in too many sectors the term gifted is taken to connote unearned privilege, thus producing problems for students who are so labelled (cited in Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000, p. 272).
5. Students generally develop the ability to demonstrate gifted levels of performance through assistance and guidance. Giftedness is developmental.
6. A policy must reflect some clear, accessible and defensible definition, while acknowledging the contentious nature of defining giftedness. This contentiousness arises in part from a variety of false dichotomies that have characterised debates in the area: vertical acceleration versus lateral enrichment; pull-out versus mainstream provisions; and, more generally, excellence versus equity as major educational goals.
7. The research in the area is patchy, but there is considerable, credible, international research that has been undertaken on aspects of gifted education.

On the other hand, there are only a few researchers working in Australia, most of whom work in other states. More research needs to be conducted in Queensland particularly in relation to the effectiveness of identification and provision.

# National perspectives

In this brief overview of policies and practices in gifted education, national initiatives and state policies are summarised, along with the work of other bodies such as the Australasian Association for the Education of Gifted Children (AAEGT). This association has disseminated research and practice in Australia through its journal and through conferences. It has also produced a position paper on the education of gifted students, and a review of the development of gifted education research and practices in Australia and New Zealand (Braggett & Moltzen, 2000).

## The Commonwealth

The education of gifted students has been a topic of national attention for some time. Embedded in the Adelaide Declaration (*The Goals of Schooling in Australia*) (Department of Education, Training, and Youth Affairs, 1999), as its first goal, is that “schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students.” Two national inquiries conducted by the Australian Senate have produced substantial reports (Colston, 1988; Collins, 2001). These inquiries were presented with research evidence and anecdotal data that highlighted the importance of attending to the education of gifted students and challenging many myths that suggest these students will achieve without specialised support. Indeed, evidence from both reviews drew attention to the general concerns voiced in submissions: “Many academically talented children not only fail to achieve their potential but actually drop out of school in large numbers (Colston, 1988, para 1.11);” and “gifted children have special needs in the education system; for many their needs are not being met; and many suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress as a result” (Collins 2001, p. xi).

The reaction of the Commonwealth government of the day to the 1988 report was to argue that, through an integrated school system with common curriculum statements, the learning by all children, including the gifted, would be enhanced. However, Collins (2001) reported that the 2001 inquiry revealed that there had been “little progress in provision for gifted children” (p. xi).

## State Policies and Practices

Over the last fifteen years each Australian state and territory has developed a policy on the education of gifted students. A recognition that gifted students require specialised teaching and support is common to many policies. However, the ways of achieving these objectives vary from state to state. Most states have revised their policy in recent years to accommodate changing developments in the field.

Policy documents across Australia tend to focus on three issues. First, policies, in an attempt to facilitate identification, present a definition of giftedness to frame subsequent expectations and requirements. Second, a brief statement setting out broad principles of intent is included. Third, policies tend to describe a set of guidelines, some of which are relatively brief while others provide details of a number of strategies recognised as preferred practices in the gifted education literature. A summary of this information for each state policy is presented in Table 3.1. A brief discussion of the key features of policy in each state is presented in the following sections. All states, with the apparent exception of New South Wales and the Northern Territory, have websites on which policy documents are available for public inspection.

### *Australian Capital Territory*

In the ACT, the May 1998 policy describes responsibilities for Central Office, School Directors, Director of Children's Services (Early Entry), and in particular of principals who, it is stated, should:

- identify gifted students so they can provide a range of learning opportunities;
- provide a variety of teaching strategies that will meet the needs of gifted students;
- decide when any form of accelerated progression is appropriate to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of individual gifted students in Years K-12;
- recognise the rights of those with parental/guardian responsibilities/ to be fully informed and to participate in all decisions relating to their child's education; and
- encourage cluster schools to promote where possible diverse gifted student program initiatives.

The departmental section responsible for gifted education is the Curriculum Initiatives section. The policy guidelines that accompany the statement provide a range of options and draw attention to issues concerning identification, hidden giftedness, teaching and learning strategies, and whole-school approaches. More detailed guidelines are provided for early entry and acceleration, and various approaches to provision are outlined, in general influenced by Gagné's (1993) DMGT (see Chapter 2).

## ***New South Wales***

The NSW Department of School Education (1991) has published two relevant documents: *Policy for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students* and, *Implementation Strategies for Gifted and Talented Students*. The policy document specifies responsibilities and is written to provide guidance for teachers, schools, regions and the central executive. It encourages the continuing development of appropriate strategies including early entry to school and accelerated progression. The implementation document focuses on a limited range of strategies, most notably endorsing Centres of Excellence, opportunity classes, and selective and specialist secondary schools, to cater for gifted students. Selective schools feature prominently in servicing gifted education, as described in a recent report on the selection processes (Watkins, 2002; Wood, 2002).

## ***Victoria***

The Victorian *Bright Futures* policy on gifted education (1995) recognised a wide definition of giftedness and recommended that “particular learning environments” were necessary for students to achieve their full potential. A review of this policy was begun in 1999, but its outcomes have not been made public. More recently, a Ministerial Committee recommended that:

the curriculum will encourage [students] to extend in areas where they are capable of performance beyond expected levels for their age, and especially where they exhibit particular talents. For all students, the curriculum will ensure that they are challenged and extended to achieve the highest standards of which they are capable. (2000, p. 39)

The Department of Education and Training subsequently released a policy entitled *The Gifted Education Strategy* in 2002. This strategy addresses six issues:

- the identification of gifted students;
- the development and provision of appropriate programs for gifted students;
- curriculum development;
- professional development;
- links with key education strategies; and
- communicating and networking.

Extensive documentation is provided on each of these issues including a database of service providers, a clearinghouse of practices submitted by teachers (‘Ideabank’) and the usual set of definitions and practices. The Gifted Education Strategy has developed exemplary gifted curriculum units in English and Science across the CSF II levels.

The development of networks and clusters of schools is a notable feature of the Victorian gifted education provision. Other initiatives include Select Entry

Accelerated Learning Programs, which allow students to complete six years of secondary schooling in five years through one of approximately 30 special schools. Students are selected by performance on a series of tests and interviews during Year 6, the year prior to commencing high school. A junior high school program is provided in compacted mode allowing students to complete Year 10 after three years of high school. This gives such students an extended range of options for their final years of schooling.

### ***Tasmania***

The Tasmanian Policy (Department of Education, 2000) addresses a number of issues including: economic benefit, the need to redress claims of elitism through equity, and sets goals such as the positive valuing of gifted students. It acknowledges the need for flexibility in provision, representation from all groups, and describes strategies and responsibilities of stakeholders. The policy is administered through the Equity Standards Branch. The Gifted Education Program provides support to individual schools, teachers and/or parents in the identification of students who are gifted, and their needs within mainstream curriculum planning. A selection of resources is provided electronically for both parents and teachers, but no critical commentaries or recommendations for use are provided. The policy relies on teacher expertise in the choice of options.

### ***Western Australia***

The Western Australian policy (Department of Education, WA, 2001) is an outcome of the Plan for Government School Education 2001-2003. This plan states: “our purpose is to ensure that all government schools students develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve their individual potential and contribute to society.” The policy is housed in the Curriculum Division and is supported by extensive electronic resources and guidelines. It is one of the more accessible sites on practices in gifted education, and the policy is distinctive in that it spells out systematic lines of accountability for gifted education. The policy contains two statements: The first concerns identification, drawing upon the work of Gagné (see Chapter 2) and provision of programs. The second statement focuses on monitoring, and it aims to set accountability processes in train. Guidelines on identification, including checklists, and other relevant practices are presented. The policy and guidelines highlight a range of special needs among gifted students including geographic isolation, gender, Aboriginality, low socioeconomic background, underachievement, disability and non-English speaking background. Practical considerations for each of these special needs groups are provided.

Additionally the department has established a program of special schools. At the primary level, Primary Extension and Challenge Centres have been established. At the secondary level, the Department of Education supports the Secondary Special Placement Program in selected metropolitan senior high schools. These programs

aim to provide gifted students with a range of specialist support in both academic and arts areas to meet their specific needs. Parents can apply on behalf of their children to attend these programs. The programs are centrally funded and aim to enable the most able gifted students to interact with their academic peers; to promote academic rigour and intellectual challenge in specific curriculum fields; and to provide opportunities for critical analysis and emphasise higher-order thought processes. Some teaching resources are provided on-line. Western Australia is also notable for the quality of its supplementary print resource material (Teaching TAGS, 1995; Secondary Teaching TAGS, 1996).

### ***South Australia***

In South Australia, the provision of gifted education is directed through the secondary SHIP (Students with High Intellectual Potential) Cluster schools program and the primary focus schools program. These schools are funded to provide specialist programs for gifted students and are acknowledged as centres of excellence in gifted education. They also serve a research and outreach function for the state. Selective entry classes are available at year-8 level in each SHIP school and students in these classes are provided with a program enabling rapid progression through to Year 12. The most recent South Australian gifted education policy was released in 1996 (DETE, 2002). The South Australian documentation endorses ability-based performance model consistent with Marland's definition (see Chapter 2 ). Information, resources and materials publicly available are limited in their scope and depth.

### ***Northern Territory***

The current 1993 policy document presents a rationale, an aim, guiding principles, a definition, types of provision, identification strategies, a statement on monitoring and roles for various levels of responsibility. The policy frames gifted education provision within the principles of the Hobart Declaration of 1989 (Ministerial Council on Education, 1989). In doing so it draws attention to the development of "talents and capacities to full potential", to the achievement of personal excellence and social outcomes and to the promotion of "equality of educational opportunities." The policy also recognises the multicultural context of the Northern Territory especially with regard to its large Aboriginal population. A definition based on Marland (1972) accompanied by explanatory notes is provided. The policy also draws attention to the need to identify underachieving gifted children. A feature of the policy is the requirement for annual reporting to the Board of Studies by a Gifted Children's Advisory Committee with membership constituted from some ten-peak bodies. Specific requirements for implementation are described with responsibilities, including fiscal, delegated to schools and the system. Strategies supported through the policy include acceleration and enrichment but, apart from some special classes in selected primary schools, there appears to be few systemic initiatives such as special or focus schools.

## Summary

There are many similarities among the policy documents in Australia in terms of definition and recommended strategies. It appears that only in Western Australia is a notion of accountability or reporting clearly evident in the published materials. Most states claim to have some schools (e.g., Northern Territory) that are specialised to address gifted education strategies, but only NSW, Victoria and Western Australia appear to have schools that offer places to students on a competitive basis. Other smaller states and territories (Tasmania and ACT) provide separate college structures, which Braggett and Moltzen (2001) argued may enhance enrichment and specialisation. Specialised primary schools or primary school classes are less popular and were disbanded in Western Australia.

Cluster grouping of schools to provide enrichment or extension activities to gifted students in a district are popular in Victoria and Western Australia. Acceleration is widely acknowledged as an appropriate strategy, and in some states, notably NSW, the procedures are detailed. Other supplementary initiatives, such as competitions, vacation schools, special community centres and activities organised by various organisations are widely used.

## Other stakeholders

### *Research Centres*

The Gifted Education Research Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) is the only specialised research and professional development centre in Australia, although some states have well-established but smaller scale units (e.g., Krongold Centre in Monash). Founded in 1997, GERRIC describes itself as “an establishment for excellence in research, teaching and services for gifted education” and claims to be the first centre of research in gifted education in the Southern Hemisphere (GERRIC, 2002). The resources produced and collected by staff at GERRIC support a number of practices endorsed in the gifted education literature, such as differentiation as well as curriculum materials specifically designed with gifted students in mind.

The Krongold Centre is a research and service centre in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Although formed as a special education centre it has developed a local reputation for quality programs for research into gifted students. Most Universities with Faculties of Education in Australia provide some support to the field of gifted education at postgraduate level. However, few institutions appear to include preservice options in their basic education courses.

## ***The Australasian Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented (AAEGT)***

The AAEGT is a national body whose membership comprises the State Gifted and Talented Associations. The AAEGT's main achievements are the publication of a journal (*Australasian Journal for Gifted Education*) and the organisation of a biannual conference of teachers and researchers. In 1995, the Association undertook a national project to review gifted education approaches in Australia. *Australian Future: A National Position Paper on the Education of Gifted and Talented Students* was prepared as a result of this review and released in 1996 (McGrath, 1996). The paper acknowledged a philosophical commitment by all state education departments to the education of gifted students. It further recognised a number of contentious issues and recommended ongoing discussion to resolve these so that gifted students can be effectively identified and appropriate provisions made. Among the issues identified were identification, differentiation, accelerated progression, special schools, disadvantaged gifted and teacher training. The focus adopted towards these issues is described as follows.

*Identification.* Recommendations were made that information be gathered from a wide variety of sources, notably from students themselves. It is argued that identification procedures err on the side of inclusivity, and that identification procedures that do not show a gender balance and a proportional representation of all socio-cultural groups should be queried regarding their intentions and their validity.

*Curriculum differentiation.* Recommendations were made that professional development in curriculum differentiation that enables classroom teachers to provide for students with exceptional abilities be routine provision in all classrooms.

*Accelerated progression:* The document acknowledged a variety of forms of acceleration and argued that, for a small proportion of gifted students, accelerated progression is essential. It recommended that principals and teachers be supported by expert advice in their consideration of optimal accelerated progression for students.

*Special schools, classes and grouping techniques:* The document acknowledged a variety of policies on special schools and classes for students with outstanding academic performance and suggested that informed discussion about the benefits and appropriateness of such programs should be held. However, where such programs were implemented it was recommended that they be staffed by experts and offer educational programs specifically designed according to the needs of the student population.

*Disadvantaged gifted students:* The paper acknowledged the need to ensure that students from all social groups are accommodated.

*Preservice training:* Concern was raised about the level of preservice teacher education and the provision of gifted education as a core unit of study in postgraduate training at certificate and masters levels.

In this section, an overview of the current policies and practices embedded in official documents or advocated by professional organisation has been presented. There is general consensus across the states in terms of recognition of the educational needs of gifted students. Some states have well entrenched practices each with a particular focus such as selective schools, focus schools or network clusters that attempt a systemic approach to supporting gifted education. At school-based level considerable variation exists in the extent to which policy is enacted. Given the reports of the Senate inquiries, problems of enactment of policy are common across the nation and can be traced to a complex interplay of knowledge, support and culture.

**Table 3.1: Summary of Australian state and territory policies on gifted education**

State	Definition	Policy Statements	Guidelines
ACT	<p>“Giftedness” refers to a student’s outstanding ability in one or more domains (e.g. intellectual, creative, socio-emotional or sensorimotor) and “talent” refers to outstanding performance in one or more fields within these domains (e.g. writing, mathematics, science and technology, sculpture, athletics, languages): that is talent emerges from giftedness as a consequence of the student’s learning experiences.</p>	<p>The department acknowledges that some members of our learning communities have gifts and talents that must be catered for in order for the learning outcomes of these students to be optimised.</p>	<p>Focus on implementation strategies and early entry, specific criteria for Acceleration and Early entry</p>
NSW	<p><b>Gifted students</b> are those with the potential to exhibit superior performance across a range of areas of endeavour.</p> <p><b>Talented students</b> are those with the potential to exhibit superior performance in one area of endeavour.</p>	<p>School principals, in consultation with parents, teachers, school counsellors and other appropriate personnel, have the prime responsibility for decisions in relation to the education of gifted students. The policy is embellished with seven statements concerning <i>responsibilities</i> of various stakeholders</p> <p>There are three specific objectives of the Strategy for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students which identify areas for improvement in gifted education in NSW schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to optimise the development of the potential of each gifted student;</li> <li>• to promote the development of a flexible approach to the education of students with superior abilities; and</li> <li>• to ensure the provision of opportunities for these students to be involved in a range of learning experiences, including Opportunity Classes, that will develop a particular talent or a range of talents.</li> </ul>	<p>Implementation strategy focuses on Acceleration, &amp; Early Entry. Refers to Feldhusen’s guidelines.</p> <p>NSW Act includes “provisions for opportunities to children with special ability”</p>

State	Definition	Policy Statements	Guidelines
South Australia	<p>A gifted* child or student will possess, to an outstanding degree, demonstrated ability or potential in one or more of the following areas: general intelligence, specific academic areas, visual and performing arts, psychomotor ability, leadership, creative thinking, interpersonal and interpersonal skills.</p> <p>Appropriate intervention by the family, community, schools, and children’s services can help a gifted child or student to reach full potential.</p> <p>* The term gifted is used to refer to individuals with high potential. The term “gifted and talented” is also commonly used.</p>	<p>Ten outcomes of policy which include: early identification, equality, appropriate opportunities, differentiated curriculum, clustering, acceleration, professional development and counselling.</p> <p>Responsibilities of managers and teachers are defined.</p>	Nil
Northern Territory	<p>Gifted students are those capable, of high performance with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability one or more specific areas.</p>	<p>The policy document is framed around three goals drawn from the Hobart Declaration of 1988 (dated 1989 earlier?):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to provide an excellent education for all young people, being one which develops their talents and capacities to full potential, and is relevant to the social, cultural and economic needs of the nation;</li> <li>• to enable all students to achieve high standards of learning and to develop self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, respect for others, and achievement of personal excellence; and</li> <li>• to promote equality of educational opportunities. and provide for groups with special learning requirements.</li> </ul> <p>Hence a general aim is to “maximise the educational outcomes for gifted and talented students”.</p>	<p>The document outlines a range of principles and processes that embed at different levels of education responsibilities for implementation and reporting. A special advisory committee is empowered to monitor implementation and report to the Board of Studies.</p>

State	Definition	Policy Statements	Guidelines
Tasmania	<p>Students who are gifted are those who show advanced development, or have the capacity for advanced development, in any valued area relative to their age peers, to a degree that modification to their educational program is necessary.</p> <p>The concept of giftedness encompasses three major aspects:</p> <p>Students who are gifted often have asynchronous development where intellectual, physical and social development may be occurring at dramatically differing rates.</p> <p>Giftedness is multifaceted encompassing a wide range of abilities and cannot be measured according to a single dimension. Consequently a range of programs may be needed to cover these dimensions.</p> <p>The development of an innate gift is likely to be influenced by environmental factors such as significant people, events and experiences as well as intrinsic variables such as motivation and personality. This means that children may be identified as gifted at different stages of schooling.</p>	<p>Students who are gifted should be provided with an appropriate range of flexible provisions in Tasmanian Government schools, to enable and support their development. While all students have strengths that should be valued and promoted, there is a small group of gifted students who require specifically targeted identification processes and programs in schools. Some provision may be provided in regular classrooms, while other programs may need to be additional.</p>	<p>Guidelines for early entry, guidelines for acceleration (International Guidelines on Suitability for Accelerated Progression are proposed in a draft document 2002). Strategies to provide for gifted students in the regular classroom are described.</p>
Victoria	<p>Does not provide a clear definition but “recognises an inclusive definition of ‘giftedness’”. This broad definition embraces and encourages excellence in all forms of intellectual, academic and creative endeavour. A list of acceptable tests and checklists is provided.</p>	<p>Identifies six strategies: identification, appropriate programs, curriculum development, professional development, links and networking. Some accelerated classes made available.</p>	

State	Definition	Policy Statements	Guidelines
Western Australia	<p>“Giftedness” refers to a student’s outstanding ability in one or more domains (e.g. intellectual, artistic or sensorimotor) and “talent” refers to outstanding performance in one or more fields within these domains: that is, talent emerges from ability as a consequence of the student’s learning experience.</p> <p>Gagné’s model of gifted and talented education has been adopted and underpins the policy and practice.</p>	<p>Statement 1 addresses two components: identification, and provision under a broad rubric: Schools and the system will plan and implement procedures to ensure that all gifted and talented students achieve optimum educational outcomes.</p> <p>Statement 2 states: Monitoring will occur to ensure that the educational needs of gifted and talented students are being met. Consequently, policy requires the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the school level, monitoring policy implementation is part of a school’s management information system and its accountability responsibilities.</li> <li>• At the district level, superintendents will negotiate processes to monitor and report on the quality of implementation of policy.</li> <li>• At the central level, reviews will be undertaken to evaluate policy and the quality of its implementation.</li> </ul>	

# International policies and practices

Many countries have developed policies for the education of students they label, in various ways, 'gifted' and 'talented'. Mönks and others (2000) reported developments in Russia, Eastern Asia, Central Asia, Europe, and South America. Access to specific government policies has been facilitated by Internet links. This section briefly describes some of the main international policy directions before providing a summary of a set of standards for gifted education produced in the USA by the National Association for Gifted Children. Recent initiatives in the UK are also reviewed and a brief outline of directions in the Asian region is provided.

## Canada

Currently within Canada there is considerable diversity in the policy positions of various provinces with respect to the philosophy and delivery of talented and gifted education. Manitoba, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and Yukon are the jurisdictions that do not have specific ministry policies concerning talented and gifted education. In general, policy in other provinces is more prescriptive than is customary in Australia. There are clear links made between educational legislation and provision as exemplified in the provinces of Alberta, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In Alberta, gifted education is managed by special education services (Alberta Education, 1997). Statements such as "the act holds boards responsible for providing special education program for students having special needs which includes students with educational disabilities and for gifted and talented students" are representative of the generally strong legislative foundations of the policy. Alberta policy states that "school authorities are required to provide special education programs based on individualised program plans (IPPs) designed to meet the educational needs of identified exceptional students." Appeal processes and review procedures are clearly described to facilitate the resolution of disputes. The state government provides funding for both government and private schools. Identification of students with special needs is mandatory and a handbook for this purpose was commenced in 1997. Despite these intentions, a review of policy in 2000 found a number of deficiencies particularly related to screening and accountability.

The Special Education Branch in the Ministry of Education of British Columbia provides extensive on-line resources to support gifted education (Ministry of Education, British Columbia, 2002). This authority has developed these resources

in consultation with practitioners, researchers and schools. These resources provide detailed support to teachers in terms of options for provisions, specific strategies, individual education programs (IEPs) and background information. The philosophy in which the material is embedded acknowledges that new research and initiatives in education, such as information and communication technologies, generally provide educators with greater freedom to individualise programs and to make the learning environment dynamic and relevant for gifted students. Recommended approaches are aimed at ensuring that gifted students have opportunities to achieve in ways that may exceed conventionally expected learning outcomes for their age. The province of New Brunswick (Department of Education, 1997) encapsulates its policy in a guidebook. This forty-page manual, with appendices, addresses a departmental position statement, definitions, and a range of resources. These resources include lists of characteristics of gifted students, identification processes, programming strategies, program evaluation, and guidance on a range of other issues. A similar manual, embedded in a broad Special Education document, has been produced by the Department of Education and Culture of Nova Scotia (Department Education and Culture, 1997).

## United States

While national legislation exists and funding is provided from the Federal Government under the Javits Act (US Congress, 1994), gifted education is primarily the responsibility of individual states. The Javits program largely supports research and demonstration programs, providing supplementary funds to support state initiatives and funds for curriculum development initiatives for gifted students. A detailed analysis of the various policy documents is beyond the scope of this review, but some general comments can be made about the range of policies examined. Approximately half the US state policies are accessible through the Internet.

The key elements of the *Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1994* are:

- (1) all students can learn to high standards and must develop their talents and realise their potential if the United States is to prosper;
- (2) gifted and talented students are a national resource vital to the future of the Nation and its security and well-being;
- (3) too often schools fail to challenge students to do their best work, and students who are not challenged will neither respond to challenging State content standards and challenging State student performance standards, nor fully develop their talents, and realize their potential;
- (4) unless the special abilities of gifted and talented students are recognized and developed during such students' elementary and secondary school years, much

of such students' special potential for contributing to the national interest is likely to be lost;

- (5) gifted and talented students from economically disadvantaged families and areas, and students of limited-English proficiency are at greatest risk of being unrecognised and of not being provided adequate or appropriate educational services;
- (6) State and local educational agencies and private nonprofit schools often lack the necessary specialized resources to plan and implement effective programs for the early identification of gifted and talented students and for the provision of educational services and programs appropriate to their special needs;
- (7) the Federal Government can best carry out the limited, but essential role, of stimulating research and development and personnel training and providing a national focal point of information and technical assistance that is necessary to ensure that the Nation's schools are able to meet the special educational needs of gifted and talented students, and thereby serve a profound national interest; and
- (8) the experience and knowledge gained in developing and implementing programs for gifted and talented students can and should be used as a basis to:
  - (a) develop a rich and challenging curriculum for all students; and
  - (b) provide all students with important and challenging subject matter to study and encourage the habits of hard work.

The policies of Indiana, Virginia and Iowa can be compared since these have been described as showing "more depth in their thinking" (Rogers, 2002). The Indiana Department of Education provides a comprehensive Resource Guide (Indiana Department of Education, 2002) as well as a website with extensive links to a variety of data sources and resources of value to teachers, parents and the community. Example lesson plans for the practice of 'tiered assessment' are provided for grades K-12. Policy is presented as the Indiana Administrative Rule 511, in which certain processes and procedures are mandated. Guidelines defining terms and processes are provided.

Legislation is phrased in terms of catering for the 'high ability student'. This student is defined (Indiana Dept Education, 2002) as one who:

- (1) performs at, or shows the potential for performing at, an outstanding level of accomplishment in at least one domain when compared to other students of the same age, experience, or environment; and
- (2) is characterised by exceptional gifts, talents, motivation, or interests.

Domains include:

- general intellectual;
- general creative;

- specific academic;
- technical and practical arts;
- visual and performing arts; and
- interpersonal.

School Improvement Plans for individual schools must address the learning needs of all students, including gifted children. In addition, strategic plans for implementation must be detailed and publicly available. These programs are public and filed with the State Department.

Similarly, Iowa has a clear policy statement based on legislation (Iowa State Legislature, 2002). Legislature mandates that all public school districts have a K-12 gifted program, 75% of which is supported by state funds. Students who are identified as gifted must be provided with access to these gifted programs. These programs must be part of total school improvement plans. The policy documents definitions, processes for implementation of plans, scope of approved expenditure and responsibilities of school districts and schools. Local schools are required to establish broad-based committees, including community representatives, to design and monitor a range of activities to enhance the learning experiences of gifted students. It is the responsibility of the school districts electing to provide such programs to ensure that they meet the requirements of the state statute and its associated rules, which include the following provisions:

- valid and systematic procedures including multiple selection criteria for identifying gifted and talented students from the total school population;
- goals and performance measures;
- a qualitatively differentiated program to meet the students' cognitive and affective needs;
- staffing provisions;
- an in-service design;
- a budget;
- qualifications for personnel administering the program; and
- district review and evaluation of its gifted and talented programming.

The state of Virginia provides a detailed plan for gifted students, accompanied by regulations, goals and activity statements, definitions, and statements of responsibilities (Virginia, Department of Education, 2002). Each school division is required to develop criteria for the early identification of gifted students, to assist in the preparation of teachers and other support staff members (counsellors, school psychologists, etc.), to serve the educational needs of gifted students, and to establish and evaluate differentiated programs following regulations approved by the Board of Education. While gifted children are described as those “whose abilities and potential for accomplishment are so outstanding that they require special educational programs to meet their educational needs,” there is an

expectation that teachers will proactively seek these characteristics through a range of strategies. Giftedness programs are also required to articulate with state curriculum standards. Short-term and extended programs for gifted students are provided through residential Governor's schools. Some of these schools are year-long, while other students spend a portion of their day at the Governor's Schools but rely on their high schools to provide other programming required for graduation. The policy acknowledges the need for professional development of all teachers but also supports specialist training with central funding.

Governor's schools and similar specialist high schools feature in a number of US states including Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Georgia, West Virginia, Illinois, Florida, Washington, Kentucky, Michigan, Massachusetts. These schools offer gifted high school students intensive learning experiences over summer months often in liaison with a local university. Laboratory schools also are found in a number of locations. These provide eligible students with opportunities to attend one day per week at a school where they experience an intense term of interdisciplinary studies. More regular specialist schools exist in a number of states. Many of these are described as High Schools for Mathematics and Science although they provide a broad and often highly integrated curriculum based on strategies such as problem based learning. The Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy is a typical institution in this respect, providing a broad curriculum for eligible gifted students as well as a centre for professional development. In addition, considerable resources and plans for regular schools are provided by many other states. The state of Texas (Texas Educational Agency, 2000) for example, provides a state plan notable for its detailed descriptions of minimal and exemplary standards for identification processes, program design, curriculum and professional development. Montana (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 1994) provides case studies of specific issues such as ways of modifying curriculum processes for gifted students. The aspirations of the Montana program is stated in the following terms: "As we seek to improve educational practices in our schools, we must not only raise the level of expectations for all, but also expand at the top to allow capable students to go beyond." Ohio (Ohio Department of Education, 2002) is also noteworthy in the information it provides, and for the scope and depth of resources publicly provided.

Characteristic features of US policy documents include the close alignment of legislation and regulation, the extensive resources provided and the alignment of funding with identification and programming. Identification in many cases appears to be based on national standardised scores. However, many programs acknowledge multiple forms of identification and the need to be aware of giftedness in marginal groups. In many policies gifted students are described as 'exceptional,' and the legislation incorporates this description. Funding appears substantial in some states; for example, in Virginia, approximately \$48 million is appropriated for gifted programs.

In the US, a noteworthy national initiative has been the development of National Standards for gifted education programs produced by the National Association for Gifted Children (Landrum, Callahan, & Shaklee, 2000). The purpose of establishing such standards was to ensure that the education of gifted children was guided by benchmarks of excellence rather than on unregulated, unconnected practices. This organisation, which represents a major peak body in the US, advocates seven critical and essential criteria for effective gifted education programming:

1. program design;
2. program administration and management;
3. socio-emotional guidance and counselling;
4. student identification;
5. curriculum and instruction;
6. professional development; and
7. program evaluation.

Some states, for example Indiana, benchmark their programs against these standards.

A recent review undertaken by the Portland Public Schools District Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee produced a substantial position paper that addressed many of the issues relevant to contemporary discussions about Gifted Education (DeLacy, 2002). This document proposed strategies and the responsibilities of the district schooling system in regard to identification, planning, assessment, consideration of geographically isolated gifted students, resourcing and budgeting. It also argued for educators to be vigilant in catering for both the special socio-emotional needs as well as curriculum requirements of gifted students. The report provides a summary of many of the contemporary beliefs about Gifted Education prevalent in the United States.

A final comment on the US relates to professional training and accreditation. In a number of states where gifted education is mandated, it is expected that teachers are qualified with postgraduate credentials to teach specialist classes.

## Europe

Initiatives for gifted education in the United Kingdom are adjunct to the Department for Education and Skills (Excellence in Cities [EiC] Policy, 2002). The UK Government spent £60 million on provision for gifted and talented pupils in the financial year 2001 to 2002. Gifted and talented aspects of EiC are now being piloted in over 1000 secondary schools and 400 primary schools. Policy statements differentiate responsibilities for both secondary and primary schools. Thus, the intent is that all participating secondary schools:

- have a co-ordinator with overall responsibility for implementing the strand;
- are part of a cluster of three to eight schools, each of which has a lead co-ordinator (clusters provide support to member co-ordinators and normally work together on a study support programme);

- identify a gifted and talented cohort comprising five to ten percent of students in each year group (at least two thirds of the cohort comprises students with academic ability, defined as ability in one or more subjects in the statutory curriculum other than art, music and PE and up to one third are talented pupils, defined as those with ability in art, music, Physical Education, or any sport or creative art);
- have developed and are implementing a whole-school policy for gifted and talented students;
- have developed and are implementing a distinct teaching and learning programme to address the individual learning needs of students in the gifted and talented cohort, focusing on their strengths and areas for further development, typically involving the use of curricular flexibility and a range of organisational approaches to open up learning opportunities; and
- through their clusters, provide supplementary out-of-school-hours study support programs, including master-classes, summer schools and mentoring opportunities.

Primary school expectations are similar to the secondary strand except that:

- in most participating schools, the cohort is confined to two year groups (Years 5 and 6);
- alongside the teaching, learning and study support programs, there is a further program to improve the transition of gifted and talented students between primary and secondary schools, which is significant for those who are within the cohort in one school but not the other, as well as those who are within the cohort in both schools; and
- schools have a 'responsible teacher' rather than a fully fledged co-ordinator, but the responsible teacher is supported by a lead co-ordinator who works with all schools in a cluster or partnership, and is responsible for introducing the strand in pilot schools.

Other initiatives include Mathematics Centres that provide out of school opportunities for mathematically gifted children, summer schools for 10-14 year olds, and funding for the National Association for Gifted Children to provide support services. An extensive professional development and accreditation program has also been developed. Accreditation is based on the completion of a personal development plan that sets out individual, personal and school based targets for each co-ordinator. Targets are agreed in negotiation with head teachers.

A major thrust for rigorous identification has been made through the development of 'World Class Tests' (Richardson, 2002). World Class Tests are aimed at students in the top 10% of ability. They enable pupils aged up to 9 and up to 13 to measure their mathematical and problem solving performance. The tests can be taken by pupils when they are ready, rather than at a specific age, and are expected to become fully computerised over time. Other resources are being developed by the

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to support gifted students within the UK. The UK policy specifically notes the important role that lead teachers take in implementing gifted education strategies and emphasises that continued support of head teachers and senior management is a pre-requisite for ensuring that the needs of gifted and talented students can be addressed.

Policies in other European countries also address gifted education. Most German states departments, for example, have long histories of involvement in gifted education. Legislation stipulates that educational provision reflect individual students' interests and capabilities. Legislation also provides explicitly for the possibility of differentiated education for gifted students, but stops short of stipulating those specialised provisions. These provisions take place within the context of a long-standing German commitment to education based on ability-streaming, and school-based centres of excellence (currently focussing on Mathematics and the Natural Sciences, Arts and Music, and Modern Languages). In addition, three schools exist for the special support of intellectually gifted students (Persson, 2000).

In Norway, gifted students are seen as students with special needs (Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, 2002). Students are assessed to determine if they need special education, and what kind of tuition should be provided. Each municipality and county authority is required to provide educational and psychological counselling and assessment services. In Austria, recent policy changes have allowed gifted pupils to skip one year at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels. In theory, students are able to sit the matriculation examination at the age of 15. Spanish and Portuguese education systems are engaged in early identification practices among children in the 4-6 year age range.

From a European Community perspective, an extensive review of education provision (Reding & Mira, 2002) provides little detailed information on gifted education provisions. Indeed the review indicates that, in contrast to the extensive policy and provision available for certain groups of special needs students, none that cover gifted and talented students was in operation among the 15 nations that then comprised the Union, even though policies were in operation within individual member states.

## **New Zealand**

Policy development in New Zealand has followed similar directions to those in Australia and North America with perhaps a greater acknowledgment of the influence of culture on gifted behaviour (e.g. Braggett & Moltzen, 2000; Moltzen, 1998). The Ministry of Education provides direction to guide policy development in gifted education (Ministry of Education, NZ, 2002) by recommending eight important components in the development of policy and disseminates detailed guidelines on each component. These components are:

- definition of children with special abilities;
- identification procedures;
- programming;
- organisational strategies;
- communication;
- resources; and
- evaluation.

The guidelines accompanying these recommendations feature a number of important principles. For example, in developing programs for gifted students, the value of ensuring continuous learning is highlighted. The recommendation is that pull-out programs be seamless so that learning experiences in these enrichment situations extend or expand in-class learning. It is also emphasised that gifted programs should not be tokenist but are incorporated into the everyday running of the school. Both acceleration and enrichment are advocated, but with the assurance that students receive quality teaching through these practices. Organisational strategies are also highlighted to emphasise the need for a team approach in the coordination and management of programs that provide a continuum of experiences and the adoption of multiple approaches.

An illustration of how one school has articulated its policy following the Ministry's guidelines is the Kristin School Policy and Implementation Strategies:

1. Rationale of Policy Statement for Education of Gifted and Talented students
2. Policy Statement for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students
3. Implementation strategies:
  - *Policy Statement 1:* The school will identify its gifted and talented students
  - *Policy Statement 2:* The school will provide professional development opportunities for appropriate school personnel in meeting the learning needs of gifted and talented students.
  - *Policy Statement 3:* The school will provide an appropriate range of opportunities for its gifted and talented students.
  - *Policy Statement 4:* Teachers will make planned provision to meet the learning needs of gifted and talented students in their classes.
4. Recommended Readings

## Asia

A number of Asian countries have policies that aspire to excellence for all students; with only some explicitly addressing gifted education. Brunei, Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia all implement practices that encourage the establishment of specialist schools or out-of-school programs. Many of these are privately operated (Wu-Tien, Cho, & Munandar, 2001). This type of provision also

operates in Singapore, and other programs address in-class curricular development for gifted students through the “Thinking School, Learning Nation” initiative. A more intense focus on professional development aims to ensure that teachers who work in Gifted Education Program schools are appropriately trained. Singapore’s policy on gifted education focuses on nurturing the intellectually gifted. Apart from the extended syllabus and integrated approach, students learn skills for research and carry out independent studies.

In Japan high schools are ranked on their ability to prepare students for University. In other countries, an example being India, the focus is on developing universal education and the democratisation of education. However, India has a number of initiatives including residential schools for gifted students (Wu-Tien, Cho & Munandar, 2001). Other Asian countries are in the process of debating the issue of equity and excellence as they grapple with more general problems of universal access to education (Lim, 1997).

As a detailed example, the Sub-committee on Special Education of the Board of Education of Hong Kong reviewed its approach to Gifted Education in 1996 and recommended:

- Gifted education should be provided on the principle of equal opportunity and not elitism.
- There should be comprehensive provisions to support gifted students and that will involve teachers at all levels. Provision for gifted students should be extended from primary to secondary schools.
- All school teachers should be aware of the needs of gifted students so that appropriate support and services to gifted children can be rendered. Teachers of special schools should also participate in the Education Department seminar/workshops on giftedness.
- Gifted education should be included in initial teacher education, refresher courses and long term development programs for teachers.
- The Education Department professional team to support the school-based program for the academically gifted children should be strengthened. Tertiary institutions in Hong Kong should consider offering a local post-graduate degree course to train professionals for gifted education.

Those Asian countries emerging as economic strengths have clearly developed programs and provisions for gifted students. The major emphasis throughout much of central and eastern Asia is free, accessible and quality education for all.

## Summary

Many countries have policies and practices dealing with Gifted Education. Views of giftedness and the support for giftedness vary according to national priorities and cultural norms. In many African countries, for example, views of giftedness

are strongly influenced by traditional values; programs deemed adequate by Western standards for gifted students are in their developmental phases. Traditional Western intellectual giftedness may be less valued than morality, work commitment, or cultural skills. Associations of giftedness with high school performance and elite schools systems sometimes reinvent colonial relationships and division in society. In other countries, gifted education practices are more actively pursued, as witnessed by the international range of presenters at conferences where gifted education research is disseminated.

Many policies and programs around the world show strong commitments to Gifted Education, most visibly in the wealthier countries and those nations whose economic strengths are newly emerging. In many countries, large-scale changes have occurred in recent years. This is particularly the case in the United Kingdom. In countries where gifted education programs have been well established, particularly the US, considerable funding and accountability are mandated by policy. In these countries, gifted education has become closely aligned with in-school and in-class provision that emphasises differentiated curricular and pedagogical practices that enhance the quality of learning experiences for gifted students.

Clearly, the extent to which a nation state or a school system focuses on education for gifted and talented students is influenced by its social, cultural and economic circumstances, and the educational imperatives that those circumstances present. Considering cases comparable to Queensland, it seems clear that such a focus is timely, and that gifted and talented education policy needs to be co-ordinated with other significant curricular policy initiatives, as in many of the national policies surveyed above.

# Data analysis: culture, context and capability

In this chapter, we summarise our consultations with teachers, school and district administrators and parents, and the other materials submitted to us. The set of questions that guided these consultations are presented in Appendix C, but the discussions usually ranged beyond the scope of these guide questions. Here we draw together the information and views presented to us under three main headings: considerations concerning the *culture* in which the Policy for the Education of gifted students operates; the immediate *contexts* in which the Policy operates; and the *capabilities* of the system and the personnel in the delivery of provision that is consistent with the Policy. We acknowledge that these headings are neither clear-cut nor water-tight; they do, however, provide a useful organization for our discussion.

Our strategy in summarising the data is to provide, under each of these three headings, discussion around a sample of direct quotes that represent the range of views we encountered. We identify the category of respondent who offered each statement.

## Policy and the professional and community culture

We summarise first aspects of the need for the Policy, its place in educational organization and practice and obstacles to its effective implementation. A selection of statements related to these issues is shown in Table 5.1.

The policy was generally taken to have a mandating function that was, again most commonly, viewed as a positive but not always recognised feature. While this needs to be taken in the context of comments summarised later about the complexity of the current policy context for schools, it does indicate an important point about the appropriate role of policy as educators view it: Clearly, educators are not in general averse to the idea of mandated policy, provided other supports are put in place, including some clear priority indicators.

**Table 5.1: The place of policy**

<p>Where policy pertains is if an issue rises it tends to be reactive rather than proactive.</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>	<p>I think every school should be mandated to do something for gifted but there are much greater priorities.</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>	<p>When policies sit in places like the DOEM, they become a reference point rather than an instructional tool.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>
<p>Policies specific to adapting and adding to the nature and operation of the general education program are necessary for gifted education (Landrum, Callahan &amp; Shaklee, 2001).</p> <p><i>Cited by Tertiary Educator</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The need for policy?</b></li> <li>• <b>The consequentiality of policy?</b></li> <li>• <b>Priorities?</b></li> </ul>	<p>While education Queensland policy adequately provides a statement of commitment and goals, it is lacking with regard to a framework for planning.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>
<p>Policy documents give us a mandate to act.</p> <p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>	<p>One of hundreds of resource documents teachers are expected to be conversant with.</p> <p><i>Retired Teacher</i></p>	<p>Policy allows you to do things.</p> <p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>

As a number of respondents indicated, a mandated policy can be enabling for educators in their dealings with one another, with District administrators, and with community members.

Common were variants on the theme that Education Queensland had asserted goals and commitment, but had yet to provide a framework for action that was sufficiently clear to enable teachers and schools to be proactive in seeking out identification and instructional procedures. Within that context, a number of educators pointed to the significant potential of the Policy to lead to changes that were more general than special provisions. The ideas given prominence in the current Policy statement were viewed by some as having important implications for mainstream education in Queensland, partly because of the view they offer of learning opportunities beyond the demonstration of minimal performance standards and pre-specified curricular outcomes.

Equally prevalent, however, were comments to the general effect that Education Queensland is currently a policy-complex environment in a period of rapid change and development. For teachers and administrators, this places increasing pressure on determining how stable levels of resources can support new and complex professional directions, and with what levels of priority: Hence the inclusion of

the comments from a Deputy Principal in the Table above, *I think every school should be mandated to do something for gifted but there are much greater priorities.* This reflects strong support for a mandated intervention into schools on behalf of Gifted Education, but a recognition that, in the view of this Deputy Principal, it does not compare in urgency with the demands faced in the local setting of his or her school. Comparable, although generally less definitive dispositions were commonly expressed.

**Table 5.2: Policy commitment, Policy implementation**

<p>I don't think a policy makes you do a good job. It doesn't make good teaching. Good schools with good teachers don't need policy to do good things in the classroom.</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>	<p>[IEP was promised by the school for my son] It is now our second year into this third school. There is still no IEP.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>	<p>[The Policy] reads fine. It is all there, talking the theory, but it never had a front seat. One major hole: there was no real funding.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>
<p>It is probably worse to have an unimplemented policy than to have no policy at all. An unimplemented policy becomes a political smokescreen and merely a web reference point for the thousands of gifted students in the state school system.</p> <p><i>Tertiary Educator</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Implementation?</b></li> <li>• <b>Commitment?</b></li> </ul>	<p>It is blatantly obvious from the number of complaints about school provisions for gifted children received by counsellors that the Queensland policy has not been implemented in schools. The policy has served only as a buffer to defend schools and government against accusations that there is little commitment to gifted education</p> <p><i>QAGTC President</i></p>
<p>Teachers are aware of it, but have not implemented the policy as such.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>	<p>Nice document but very few people would unpack it.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>	<p>I haven't used the policy document with schools or with parents. It doesn't transcribe into everyday practice.</p> <p><i>Enrichment coordinator</i></p>

A range of differing views were expressed concerning the extent of commitment and implementation of the Policy on the education of gifted students in Queensland schools. On the one hand, the full implementation of the Policy was regarded by most respondents as essential for effective school organization and classroom practice. On the other, some educators pointed out that policy was neither necessary nor sufficient for the provision of effective work with gifted and talented students. This is an important point: For many, especially parents, the simple fact of the demonstrably less-than-comprehensive implementation of the current Policy is a matter of some puzzlement – it is, in a sense, the bottom line of the argument: ‘There’s the Policy. Where’s the implementation?’ For educators, especially principals and district officers, the policy environment places multiple, simultaneous demands on systems and schools, and policy itself is, perhaps of this complexity, generally not seen to carry such authoritative denotations, as reflected in the comments shown in Table 5.2.

The statement included above to the effect that *an unimplemented policy becomes a political smokescreen*, while not representing a common observation, is nonetheless notable. It reflects an implication of a number of comments to the effect that Education Queensland is not serious about the implementation of this Policy, as evidenced by a lack of adequate funding levels and resource and personnel support. The inference from a combination of the comments summarised so far is that there is in some quarters the appearance of a lack of interest in or commitment to Policy addressing the education of gifted students that may well arise from the complexity of the current policy environment in Education Queensland, the high-profile initiatives under way in other areas, and an apparent lack of specificity by way of guidelines and accountability and reporting procedures.

One of the striking findings from the consultations was the low visibility of the Policy in districts and schools, and even in those cases where the existence of the Policy was known, a lack of awareness of its contents, sometimes accompanied by a lack of appreciation of its implications for school organization and classroom work. A selection of comments relating to these matters is presented in Table 5.3.

These statements, typical of many across various sites, require little commentary. It is clear that even senior educational administrators at district and school levels, have either no knowledge of the existence of the Policy or little knowledge of its contents. It is simply not a visible Policy. Even within the Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented, we found little sense that policy knowledge was necessary for the pursuit of effective gifted programs.

**Table 5.3: The visibility of the Policy**

<p>A significant failure in Queensland is the knowledge of staff of the gifted education policy and its implications.</p> <p><i>Tertiary Educator</i></p>		<p>Policy on education of gifted students is not being implemented in many state schools.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>
<p>This [policy] document needs to be made public. Until I mentioned it, some teachers didn't know that this one existed.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness?</li> <li>• Visibility?</li> </ul>	<p>... unless it impacts, or has been part of a specific launch, with a whole range of in-service to go with the document and ongoing commitment to maintain ...</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>
<p>I didn't know it was there.</p> <p><i>Special Education Teacher</i></p>		<p>There is very little awareness of the policy.</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>

The Policy's invisibility and how it may become more visible and enjoy more awareness in the profession and the community are taken up by a numbers of respondents. Comments are summarised in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: Leadership and 'driving forces' for the Policy**

<p>Really if there was a push from principals and administrators to [develop awareness of the Policy] then things would happen.</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>		<p>There are no driving forces in terms of the actual policy document.</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>
<p>All staff in head office responsible for planning and policy should have an understanding of gifted education.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership?</li> <li>• Public understanding?</li> </ul>	<p>We need to devise a plan to disseminate all the new understandings to schools and make sure that this gets to the teachers and not just filed away.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>
<p>There is a lack of community understanding of the needs of gifted children and limited acceptance of special programming for them.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>	<p>There is insufficient understanding in the general community about gifted children and their needs.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>	<p>My staff have little or no knowledge of a Gifted and Talented Education Policy.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>

Again, little commentary is required on these points, although it needs to be suggested that a range of Education Queensland policies may enjoy similarly low levels of visibility and professional and community awareness. The contents even of those initiatives currently with high profile, such as the New Basics project, may be known only vaguely by many teachers and educational administrators.

### The Context of the Policy

The context in which the current Policy operates can be represented by three basic motifs: the strategic direction of education in Queensland schools; the prevailing departmental initiatives for the gifted in particular the Learning and Development Centres - Gifted and Talented; and the systemic moves toward structural flexibility and diversity as a means of effectively providing for a diverse range of student needs. We begin with a consideration of the strategic directions for education generally and the place of a Policy directed at gifted students, a sample of comments on and around which is provided in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.5: The Policy and Strategic Directions for Education Queensland**

<p>I'd give that teacher five stars for catering for my needs. I didn't have to stick to the curriculum. This teacher gave me wings and told me to fly.</p> <p><i>Student</i></p>	<p>New Basics is challenging everyone to set up challenging learning contexts in which gifts become highly visible.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>	<p>The Learning and Development Centres - Gifted and Talented are under-utilised. The experts are the enrichment coordinators.</p> <p><i>Principal LDC</i></p>
<p>A lot of what is said in 2010 is about gifted education but it is never explicitly said. Unless you have that understanding you don't see how much they intersect.</p> <p><i>Enrichment Coordinator</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education Queensland's strategic direction?</li> <li>• Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented?</li> <li>• Flexibility and diversity?</li> </ul>	<p>The tragedy is that without real strain on the system, we could make things so much better for every child, in every classroom, every day.</p> <p><i>Educational Broker</i></p>
<p>It's about getting rid of barriers. If school is more flexible, and structures break down, then that is the way to go about it.</p> <p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>	<p>Learning development Centres - Gifted and Talented should take a role in disseminating the policy document.</p> <p><i>Enrichment Coordinator</i></p>	<p>It is a shame really that with these new documents there is not that specific emphasis on the needs of gifted kids.</p> <p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>

*Queensland State Education 2010 (QSE - 2010) and the related documents; Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001 - 2005 and the Years 1-10 Curriculum Framework for Education Queensland Schools: Policy and guidelines*

provide a basis for understanding the context in which current policy documents operate. Similarly, The New Basics Project provides another crucial dimension to understanding the context in which current policies operate. Documents such as *New Basics - Theory into Practice*, *New Basics - Curriculum Organisers* and *New Basics - The why, what, how and when of rich tasks* provide guidance in understanding the reciprocal relationships between components of New Basics, Productive Pedagogies and Rich Tasks.

As is clear from Table 5.5, respondents reported themselves looking for ways to meaningfully connect these recently issued Education Queensland documents. A number of respondents expressed concerns about the range of messages, some complementary, some conflicting, that these documents were sending. Comments were variants on the theme that the experience was like receiving *bits of a jigsaw* (Deputy Principal), resulting in some individuals' experiencing confusion about the current focus of their work. Other respondents indicated that they felt overwhelmed by the policy overload and were consequently experiencing change fatigue.

Equally, prevalent, however, were comments to the general effect that connections between the components of recent policy initiatives could be made. A number of respondents, particularly those involved with the Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented, could see the connections between recent Education Queensland initiatives and their work with gifted students. However, these respondents expressed concern and frustration about the lack of clarity of these links. As one Enrichment Coordinator explained, *it is only with the lens of gifted education, that we see the connections*. This comment reflects the strong feeling among some of the respondents that the teaching and learning experience and understandings that have been developed by the Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented are undervalued. A number of respondents recognised the usefulness that their knowledge of gifted education could bring to *'unpacking and supporting'* the new curriculum framework. They saw this integration as a way of ensuring that the needs of gifted students were considered as part of current structures rather than as something separate and hence optional. Conversely, several respondents were concerned about such an integration resulting in a loss of identity for the special needs of gifted students.

Finally, a number of respondents indicated that recent Education Queensland initiatives would automatically solve the special needs of gifted students. For example, one respondent stated: *New Basics is being marketed as the answer to my mixed ability classes* (Principal). It was clear from the data that, in some instances, respondents did not have a detailed understanding of how these initiatives could specifically assist them in responding to the needs of their gifted students. In this way recent initiatives were sometimes seen as a panacea for a wide range of teaching and learning needs.

The Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented, are seen to play a crucial role in Education Queensland's current policy initiatives for gifted students. The data suggest that these centres have developed a substantial pool of expertise, but that this expertise is not being accessed widely. As one principal explained: *We look for answers within our own districts because each district has its own unique needs.* There was a strong concern regularly expressed by respondents that the next phase of policy development should provide practical exemplars demonstrating implementation. The data indicate that the Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented, can play a role in both developing and disseminating such resources. Similarly, the data suggest a concern about the current policy document lacking visibility (as discussed previously). Again a number of the Enrichment Coordinators expressed the notion that the Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented could take a leading role with this function.

*Queensland State Education 2010 (QSE - 2010)* makes explicit the need for Queensland state schools to be creative and flexible in organising their learning programs in response to the individual needs of students (pp. 8, 10, 18). Our data show that this call for greater creativity and flexibility in organisational approaches to learning also comes from classroom teachers, parents and students. A selection of statements related to this theme is shown in Table 5.5. Some teachers and parents related anecdotes that spoke to the frustration experienced by those who unsuccessfully sought such responses, and the satisfaction of those who were successful. What these anecdotes do draw attention to is that access to such structural creativity and flexibility seems to be a matter of 'luck'. Many respondents outlined how they were 'lucky' to have found someone who was willing and able to do react to their needs in a flexible way. The need to take down the 'barriers' to learning was a clear message expressed by many participants.

## **Understanding and implementing the Policy: System and teacher resources**

A number of issues emerged relating to the capacity of the school system to develop and enact policy and deliver on the provision of effective strategies and structures to afford gifted education. The system's evident policy fragmentation was critiqued and questioned in terms of its capability to deliver at all levels: Head Office, District Offices, Principals and administrators and teachers. In addition, many stakeholders questioned the quality and extent of professional development and preservice education. The capability of schools to develop and implement policy was featured in the data. The impact of support structures, for example the Learning Development Centres, on the resources of individual teachers (their knowledge of and beliefs about gifted education, repertoires of effective strategies, access to appropriate materials and models for classroom use, and so on) emerged as a significant issue. In this chapter, we explore data informing the review about the capability of the system and teachers to implement strategies.

Almost unanimous disquiet with the quality or level of gifted education training in preservice and in-service programs was evident. The comments reported in Table 5.6 are representative of the range and perspectives adopted concerning the knowledge base of teachers and the system. Parents and teachers in particular asserted that preservice education was inadequate to prepare beginning teachers with the capabilities necessary to identify and cater for gifted students. There was also widespread belief that most teachers were lacking in skills in this regard. This perception was reinforced during the data collection process by the comments made by a number of teachers.

**Table 5.6: The preparation and expertise of teachers in implementing the Policy**

<p>The most important factor affecting implementation of the policy is the limited number of teachers and other school personnel with training in gifted education.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>	<p>You can't legislate unless there is up-skilling of teachers, otherwise you do a slapdash job.</p> <p><i>Head of Department, High School</i></p>	<p>We need teachers with a background that is not imposed but which draws you in. How do we raise the level of commitment? I guess we need to get someone first with an interest.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>
<p>What I see as normal in the way I operate is not the way many teachers operate. They are still at the stage of 'everybody will do this sheet' and 'how do I cater for the diversity? Does that mean I have to have twenty different sheets?' You don't have any sheets ...It all goes back to what teachers know, and what teachers know is quite limited.</p> <p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>In-service and preservice education?</b></li> </ul>	<p>I believe we need to look at really educating our teachers to understand things like multi-aging, that the New Basics could well be the way to go ... but teachers have got to stop being afraid of letting kids fly. There has to be support for teacher in-service.</p> <p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>
<p>I would have thought that some of our new teachers coming into the field would be leading lights but this is not so. If it is core business lets start right back therewith that training.</p> <p><i>Special Education Teacher</i></p>	<p>The current policy wrongly assumes that classroom teachers are capable of identifying gifted children in their classrooms.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>	<p>Where is the expertise that can provide these extensions, enrichment and sustained focused development of their gifts? Where are the resources that should be made available to extend these children, <i>within</i> their classrooms?</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>

In some sites, there was clear evidence that those who had participated in professional development or postgraduate training felt more conversant with contemporary theories and practices. There was a general expectation that new teachers should be well informed about identification of gifted children, provisioning and evaluation of gifted education programs. We also found widespread concern about the level of professional development, and a belief that specialist training was necessary for at least some key staff to provide leadership. Several parents were particularly adamant about training in both preservice and in-service contexts.

As policy and accompanying documentation is a powerful guide for practice, it is not surprising that given such low visibility there is general lack of awareness concerning effective strategies. Indeed the policy document itself was rarely referred to, and the supporting resource document even less known. Claims were also made that information contradicting the Policy in regard to matters such as acceleration had been disseminated. Not knowing the official policy meant that apparent misinformation was often accepted as policy.

The Learning and Development Centres - Gifted and Talented, are charged with enhancing the implementation of policy and systemic capability. However, many of the schools visited that were not Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented, were only vaguely aware of the role and support available through these centres. As a state-wide initiative there is evidence to support Imison's contention that the program has been successful at least in developing a base of expertise. (Could support Imison in recommending that more LDCs would address this.)

A common comment was that the policy needed to be supported by appropriate resources and guidelines. For example, given the widespread acceptance of the principle of acceleration, there was confusion about implementation processes: hence the need for guidelines. A concern that emerged at one site related to the efficiency of data collection about students' needs and the subsequent communication of this information. Extensive data collected in primary school about the performances and capabilities of students was not made available to the high school. This created concerns among parents and frustration among primary school teachers, as shown in the selection of comments presented in Table 5.7.

**Table 5.7: The systems' capability to deliver the Policy**

<p>What has been used effectively has been Education Queensland Four Strand Model of Curriculum Provision because the layout and structure is more practical and people can relate to it more readily. I've used the Policy but it has been a little bit much for some people and perhaps not specific enough in some places.</p>	<p>I would recommend an acceleration policy be developed [which defines] responsibilities – need guidelines.</p>	<p>Which policy? The latest one? Where are they? Are the teachers familiar with the document? No! Education Queensland's policy has been very frustrating.</p>
<p><i>Enrichment Coordinator</i></p>	<p><i>District Officer, Policy</i></p>	<p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>
<p>People were told that the policy of the department was not to accelerate or grade-skip and that is quite blatantly the opposite to what is said in the (policy) document.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Systemic capability?</b></li> </ul>	<p>Education Queensland wants to have clear in their own minds what their philosophy is. Is it academic rigour or are going to give a lot of little rich tasks that schools are going to implement?</p>
<p><i>Principal</i></p>		<p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>
<p>66 schools in the district but only one coordinator. In [name of another district], there is a district Educational Adviser as an extra body.</p>	<p>There is no central office drive.</p>	<p>The LDCs have to be eights parts of one.</p>
<p><i>District Director</i></p>	<p><i>Principal</i></p>	<p><i>Principal</i></p>

In discussions with educators, references were made to a range of classroom practices related to the education of gifted students. Schools or individual teachers currently implement initiatives ranging from 'thinking skills' programs, 'multiple intelligences', to various features of what would be described in the literature as 'differentiated' programming. Evidence of research-based implementation however was scant. Discussions relating to classroom practice were often centred on identification of gifted students and supporting underachieving students. Principals and others expressed broader concerns about the difficulty of catering for students with widely differing levels of learning abilities. An alternative model emerging in some schools is based on multi-age initiatives in which the constraints of a lock step, chronologically-linked structure are minimised or overcome. Focussing on strategies described at a broader school-based level a number of approaches were identified and described. At other sites, there appeared little systematic or shared understanding of in-class practices recommended as good provision. For example, a number of schools described the use of

competitions such as the ‘Tournament of Minds’ as key strategies, substituting for more comprehensive strategies developed in previous departmental initiatives.

**Table 5.8: Classroom Practice and the Policy**

<p>Attention should also be given to providing examples of how gifted students may be at risk through inadequate educational provision.</p> <p><i>Tertiary Educator</i></p>	<p>We need to make teachers comfortable with the notion that if they have identified a kid as gifted, they don’t have to do the same as every other kid is doing, and then go on with the gifted program.</p> <p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>	<p>The underachiever is swept under the carpet, because he is often, at least average. As a parent watching this, it hurts. You feel totally helpless.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>
<p>How can we increase the rigour for all children? In a classroom it is about recognising that if we have an inclusive focus then you are constantly working to find out where each child is to try to help the individual in that learning program. That is the challenge for us and it is not just about the gifted child.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Classroom practice?</b></li> </ul>	<p>My gut feeling is that you cannot hope to ask a teacher to handle a wide range of abilities in a classroom but I do also have a social conscience that says at times we do need to have all kids mixed together somehow. We say we cater for differences but I don’t think we do. However, I don’t think we could keep up the teaching for a wide spectrum class every day.</p> <p><i>Principal</i></p>
<p>The social and emotional needs of the gifted must be considered; this impacts on performance and behaviour.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>	<p>In our approach we are trying to provide inclusive classrooms. It is not the <i>amount</i> of gifts but <i>what</i> gifts they have.</p> <p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>	<p>It can’t be a gamble, in getting a supportive teacher one year, and then someone who lacks understanding the next.</p> <p><i>Parent</i></p>

In discussion with staff concerning the way they attempted to implement strategies for gifted education a number of approaches emerged. These ranged from whole school initiatives to discrete in-class strategies. A selection of comments relevant to these approaches is provided in Table 5.9.

One school visited had successfully adopted a multi-age approach. The multi-age model appeared to be a powerful approach to inclusivity and was presented as a desirable approach to the education of the gifted because it breaks the link between age and performance/intellectual development. The approach provided an embedded school-wide framework for the identification and differentiation of curriculum to meet individual needs. It was suggested that the multi-age approach also appeared to address the area of social-emotional development. Teachers at

that school focussed on the notion of breadth of gifts as a focus rather than the depth with the aim to develop students holistically by focussing on weaknesses rather than on supporting strengths. Clearly the underlying success of this model is the support and leadership of the principal, and the shared culture and philosophy of the school. Indeed, this approach might be seen as a “hidden school” in its achievement of gifted education as described in the survey of international policies and practices in Chapter 2. The facility of multi-age organisation to provide for gifted students, however, received mixed responses when discussed in other meetings.

The staff of several primary schools discussed strategies involving extension classes or special classes for particular key learning areas, mostly for mathematics. Most staff from primary schools mentioned some form of in-class activity such as ‘thinking skills’ programs, collaborative learning or special competitions. The proponents lauded most of these approaches, however the scope of this Review provided no opportunity to examine their effectiveness. Acceleration appears to be accepted widely across the state but implemented infrequently and with varying degrees of success. Principals did acknowledge the need for careful consideration and counselling support.

**Table 5.9: A Variety of Approaches to Implementing the Policy**

<p>The whole school curriculum needs to be structured to identify and cater for individual student strengths, abilities and learning styles.</p>	<p>I believe that gifted and talented kids have special needs, and should be part of the special needs umbrella, but that is not recognised where I am.</p>	<p>Gifted education is about a whole problem in education, where teachers try to do what they can, and often what is comfortable.</p>
<p><i>Primary Principal</i></p>	<p><i>High School, Head of Department</i></p>	<p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>
<p>Units are offered not because ‘you have to do this you are in year 9 or 8 or whatever’ they are offered because ‘this is what this unit is about.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Approaches?</b></li> </ul>	<p>Outcomes-based stuff is going to make it worse for these kinds of students.</p>
<p><i>Deputy Principal</i></p>		<p><i>Classroom Teacher</i></p>
<p>New Basics has some connection with our cross-curriculum connection groups. which would work better for our target group of students if there was a much better spread of identification, tracking, differentiation. We would have a better idea of our leading students.</p>	<p>No kid is going to sit there and engage if they are bored. ... The challenge to the teachers in the New Basics has just been fantastic because it has lifted our game in relation to intellectual rigour. How do we engage these kids and what are our skills? Underpinning all of this is Productive Pedagogies.</p>	<p>Everybody sees the gifted and talented terminology as something separate. Unless you have got someone there ... to say ‘no, this is part of gifted and talented education, getting the best from all your students thus allowing those with potential to move on from the rest of the class.’</p>
<p><i>Extension Teacher</i></p>	<p><i>Primary Principal</i></p>	<p><i>Enrichment Coordinator</i></p>

One high school visited has established a cross curriculum extension elective that runs over two years and aims to cater for students who met certain criteria for entry. The coordinator of that initiative does not try to be involved in specific subject extensions but looks to develop the ability of students to conceptualise responses to given problems, and to develop students’ ability to appraise and analyse their work processes critically.

Another high school had adopted a vertical curriculum approach. In this school, gifted students have the opportunity to explore interdisciplinary higher order problem solving tasks. A third high school had developed expertise in curriculum differentiation. Teachers were developing units of work in, for example, science, that could be enacted in a regular classroom and yet meet the needs of a range of learners.

Responding to recent initiatives such as New Basics, Productive Pedagogies and Rich Tasks, many teachers argued that the New Basics appeared to be

**Table 5.10: Resourcing the Policy**

<p>Even if a teacher feels that they may like to accommodate a gifted child appropriately that there is nowhere for them to go for assistance and support. <i>Parent.</i></p>		<p>No doubt some students benefit from these Centres (Learning Development) but I see no sign of such assistance at the schools my children attend. <i>Parent</i></p>
<p>We need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of models from different schools. <i>Chaplain</i></li> <li>• Stories of how programs were set up. <i>Deputy Principal</i></li> </ul> <p>There is a need for a specialist person in any large school. <i>Classroom Teacher</i></p> <p>For students and teachers the document and the policy do not provide any practical strategies or direction. <i>Principal</i></p>	<p>• <b>Resourcing?</b></p>	<p>The policy needs to refer explicitly to how teachers and educators will be offered support in the identification of gifts and talents for other than “co-operative, non-handicapped .. teacher pleasers” and for children who, for example, are poor and non-white. The policy also needs to indicate mechanisms of support for teachers engaging in the provision of differentiated enrichment curriculum. <i>Commission for Children and Young People</i></p>
<p>Our main focus is differentiated curriculum development. It takes a long time to develop a differentiated unit – teachers need support – teachers do not have time. <i>Enrichment Coordinator.</i></p>		<p>LDCs are under-utilised. – the experts are the enrichment coordinators in schools and the department does not consult with them. The department is not consulting these experts. We never get asked anything. <i>LDC Principal</i></p>

philosophically harmonious with the aims of gifted education (as discussed previously). Some reference was made to the Rich Tasks as synonymous with strategies recommended in a number of well-known gifted education programs. As interdisciplinary, complex and meaningful tasks, Rich Tasks are seen to present open-ended challenges for gifted students. Teachers including those with specialist training in gifted education also endorsed Productive Pedagogies with general enthusiasm. Some enrichment coordinators proffered an argument that productive pedagogies were strongly in phase with gifted education strategies. However, because the in-service presented had not made this link explicit, there was a belief that many teachers were not able to see the interrelationship.

## Summary

In this chapter, we have attempted to clarify the issues impacting on the implementation of policy. As a framework for understanding the various perspectives, the data have been broadly categorised into beliefs about how the system, districts, schools and teachers can engage productively with policy.

### *Policy and Culture*

The issues raised in relation to the culture in which the Policy for the Education of Gifted Students operates indicate that consideration needs to be given to the following in the next phase of Policy development:

- High visibility is essential to achieve comprehensive commitment and implementation of the Policy.
- A mandated policy must be supported with adequate funding levels and resource and personnel support.
- The goals and commitment asserted in the Policy Statement need to be supported with the provision of a clear framework for action.

### *The Context of the Policy*

The issues raised in relation to the Policy and strategic directions for Education Queensland indicate that consideration needs to be given to the following in the next phase of Policy development.

- The connections between Education Queensland documents, including policy initiatives and curricular guidelines, must be clearly made.
- Descriptions of the needs of gifted students must be explicitly embedded in all Education Queensland initiatives, ensuring that addressing these needs is understood as 'core business' for regular classroom practice.
- Learning communities must be systematically established and maintained so that collective wisdom can be developed and resources can be shared effectively.
- A balance must be struck between structure and adaptability: Policies need to be cross-referenced to guidelines in such a way that school communities can comply with the Policy while developing programs that are responsive to the demands of local settings.

### *System and Teacher Capability to Implement Policy*

In relation to the capacity of the state school system to enact policy on gifted education and deliver effective provision, two issues need to be given consideration in the next phase of policy development: the knowledge level of individual teachers, and the provision of systemic support structures.

- The quality or level of gifted education training in pre-service and in-service, continuing professional development programs should be addressed.
- The effectiveness or otherwise of 'hidden' gifted programs needs to be established.
- Awareness concerning effective strategies should be provided.
- Policy needs to be supported by appropriate resources and guidelines.
- The points above should be approached through the continued effective work of the LDC system and otherwise, to network those educators with involvement in gifted education, and make this work available beyond the LDC networks.

These major themes arising from the consultations for this project form the bases of the recommendations listed and discussed in Chapter 6.

# Discussion and recommendations

What we found in this Review was not so much that educators in Queensland were having trouble with the Policy Statement on the Education of Gifted Students; indeed, many remained untroubled even after they were informed of its existence. Rather, it is this patchy visibility itself that continues to set unacceptable limits on the kinds and levels of academic and artistic achievement that many students could attain over the course of their school careers. The problem of the uneven visibility of the Policy and the options it affords schools and teachers relate in part to the apparent lack of specificity in the support document, and to an inter-generational lack of professional interest in or commitment to seeking those options out.

Interest in and commitment to gifted education relate as well to some fundamental definitional confusion that the current Policy does little to alleviate in offering the following definition:

*Gifted student are those who excel, or who have the potential to excel, in general or specific ability areas.*

The definition relies on the key ideas of performance or the ‘potential’ to perform; ‘potential’ is presumably observable through a highly differentiated performance profile, whereby high capabilities are demonstrated in one, possibly non-curricular domain, and substantially lower levels demonstrated elsewhere. That is, the assumption seems to be that the category ‘gifted students’ includes those who show highly differentiated patterns of performance, and thus run strongly counter to the moderate to high positive correlations generally found in batteries of educational performance assessments. Without spelling out, at least briefly, the observable features of ‘potential,’ the definition does little to direct the practical attentions of educators; thereby, it does little to motivate them to follow up in the collection of appropriate materials, the development of appropriate strategies, or the close and informed observation of students. A rewritten Policy needs to take account of the ways in which policies help to ‘produce’ the category of interest, to draw out from the apparently incalculable diversity of contemporary classrooms a set of actionable categorisations.

Policy concepts must have clarity (stating in observable terms the outcomes expected), internal coherence (between outcomes sought and the means toward them) and external coherence (between the outcomes and the societal values to be served by these outcomes).

*La Brecque (1995)*

The label 'gifted student' has been applied to students displaying a range of attributes:

- To students who are able to move more rapidly through syllabus materials than most of their age-grade peers – that is, faster movers than the 'normal student' projected by the syllabus;
- To the student who appears to think differently from age-grade peers – for example, who qualitatively distinctive kinds of intellectual work characterised by predisposition for combinatorial / connective processing, linking ideas to:
  - practical applications;
  - ideas from other curricular areas;
  - other ways of knowing about a topic; or
  - other dimensions of activity (aesthetic, motor, social, etc).
- To students who display domains of strong performance but not consistently so; that is, to students who display strongly differentiated profiles of performance, such that these students convey the strong and reasonable impression that they have 'potential' to perform at consistently higher levels.

These we can see as, respectively, the vertical and horizontal aspects of the 'problem' of gifted education, or, again respectively, the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the intellectual demands of classroom performance. There is a serious need to address these issues through some broader discussion of the critical questions: Who are we dealing with here? What is it that distinguishes the student regarded as 'gifted'? In other words, for whom is the policy being written and implemented? Policy, as we have found in this Review, is an instrument with which parents can argue for more effective and responsive teaching, and with which schools can engage in strategies such as acceleration and enrichment.

The observation has been made, in the research literature and by some of those consulted in this project, that being a 'fast-mover' or 'different thinker' can result in some students'

- feeling constrained by mainstream syllabus work and school and classroom work organisation;
- feeling bored in a conventional school learning environment;
- showing 'average' or below 'average' school performance as a way of maximising social bonding with peers, or because of disabilities or knowledge deficits in key domains; and/or
- evidencing passive or disruptive behaviour in conventional classroom settings.

The field of Gifted Education in Australia is characterised by considerable controversy over what constitutes ‘giftedness,’ by no small amounts of frustration in some circles, and by cynicism or apparent neglect in others. It is important to note, however, that definitions of ‘giftedness’ are no more difficult or contentious than those in operation in many other educational priority areas: Unequivocal delineations of the categories English as Second Language students,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students, students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities, students disadvantaged by Socio-Economic status, and so on are, in general, simply not available – nor are they taken to be necessary preconditions for educational effort. What is striking is the minimal potential of definitional imprecision for obstruction and prevarication in debates and action in these domains compared to the area of gifted education. These other priority sectors are open-textured categorisations with fluid and changing contents and criteria for ‘entry.’ Nonetheless, they signal courses of action for educational systems, and the terminologies, however debatable, provide short-hand devices and organisational structures through which that action can occur.

The gap between policy and implementation is greater when the voices of key stakeholders have been suppressed in the process of policy design.

*(Reimers and McGinn (1995, p.9).*

Rather than conceptualising these only as notable features of individual students, it is more productive for policy to see these characteristics as consequences of the interaction between what students bring to school and the educational contexts (the nature and logic of knowledge and learning and how its acceptable displays are determined) in which their learning is to take place. To explore this interaction, the curriculum of schools and the syllabuses that guide their work needs to be viewed as selective traditions in four respects:

- The topics to be studied and learned;
- The scope and duration over which these topics are to be addressed;
- The sequences of topics and the processes and capabilities those sequences both presume and install; and
- The ways, means and contexts in which acceptable learning is displayed, enacted and applied (including the technologies, semiotics and interpersonal norms and routines that characterise classroom work).

These selective traditions are based on cultures’ and systems; ‘best bets’ on the features of ‘average students’ at each age-group – their interests, capabilities, needs and general socio-cultural knowledge, including their norms of interpersonal interaction. It is clear that these ‘best bets’ are part of the institutional inheritance of each generation of teachers, school administrators and syllabus writers, passed on through initial teacher preservice programs and other professional acculturation activities. Schools do not, therefore, simply respond to

the contents of these best bets; as well they construct them and reconstruct them anew, recreating normality in each cohort of new students. Thus, much of the machinery of schooling is aimed to or functions to (re)produce ‘the average  $n$ -year-old student.’

Syllabus and curriculum guidelines and the organisation of schools serve to validate these best bets in order to maximise students’ movement within a system and to have educational provision that is publicly based on apparently equitable allocation of resources.

When I read the policy when it first came out it said ‘this is our philosophy of our school. It is the philosophy of multi-age grouping and what we are trying to achieve for all children.’ You could take out the concept of ‘giftedness’ and put in ‘children’ because our philosophy is there is no such thing as an ‘average’ child ... I have not met an average child yet.

*Principal*

The statistical production of ‘the average student’ is an outcome of the need for school systems to validate their rankings of students and thereby the differential access to subsequent experiences and resources that these rankings afford. The need for this notwithstanding, what teachers face are the qualitative and quantitative diversities in evidence in any group of students. These diversities are often at the one time highly consequential for learning and simply incommensurate – matters of quality of activity and performance.

It is therefore not surprising that the formation and development of educational policies that directly address these diversities will present difficulties and require frequent revisitation. These difficulties reflect the limitations of age-based, centrally-developed curriculum provisions as comprehensive frameworks for educational action across an entire system; they are in essence a recognition of the artefactual nature of the statistical production of ‘the average student’ through assessment and syllabus-production procedures.

This is not to say that students, parents and the community at large cannot learn to think of themselves and others as ‘average,’ – they can and regularly do – but only that it is imperatives relating to the central administration of educational services that produce a sense of the ‘gradable society.’ One of the consequences of accountable mass, centrally-administered education is that people take it that what is important about what they have learned from their life experiences is always able to be benchmarked against what they could or should have learned, according to publicly known criteria.

In that light, it can be seen that schools take themselves to have a fundamental responsibility to deliver minimum standards for social, civil and vocational

participation, to instil and practice those capabilities and dispositions that are necessary for the adequate management of certain life skills. Alongside debates about what might count as ‘adequacy’ in rapidly changing cultural, communicational, and technological environments, we find continuous debate about what is possible and desirable beyond these minimum standards for performance and knowledge. With whatever levels of empirical validity, theoretical coherence or professional consensus, these minimum standards can at least be ‘promised’ through quasi-legislative specifications (e.g., as in ‘outcome benchmarks’) as part of the social compact between schools and their host societies.

Policies are ... dynamic and interactive, and not merely a set of instructions or intentions.

*(Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997, p. 7).*

What cannot be so well framed in quasi-legislative terms are the horizontal and vertical boundaries of learning. Just as the full range of capabilities and dispositions of highly effective citizens cannot be easily staked out, not can the full possibilities for motivation to learn, proclivities for critical analysis and novel combinations of ideas and techniques that students can develop in school. That is, what cannot be readily legislated, enumerated or standardised are the kinds of learnings that syllabuses and teachers

cannot imagine in advance as outcomes for a given age-group in school. This is one of the reasons that the notion of ‘gifted students’ is difficult even to approach from the standpoint of a resource-tight, equity-conscious public school system. The notion of ‘gifted education’ can disrupt these discourses in productive and critical ways.

Today’s landscape is quite different to when the current policy document was written.

*Classroom Teacher*

Syllabuses function to set the scope, sequence and tempo of students’ activities and accomplishments. These are chunked into grade levels as administrative conveniences. So ‘enrichment’ often means a digression into extra-curriculum areas rather than acceleration through bodies of knowledge within the syllabuses’ scope and sequences, because to do otherwise further damages the age-chunking of syllabus.

Advocates of Gifted Education have at various times, or sometimes simultaneously, located the challenge of educating gifted students in the discourses of ‘special needs,’ inclusiveness, and the pursuit of excellence in academic and artistic functioning, the latter often in terms analogous to the production of sporting or athletic elites. From the vantage of administering public

education, these three discourses appear institutionally and ideologically contradictory: helping strugglers, coping with diversity, or liberating the exceptional capabilities of a few to even higher standards of academic performance. A rewritten Policy needs to be unequivocal in its placement of gifted education

For gifted students, there are often no appraisal, identification and support systems in place, visible in operation; there are exhortations to deal with these students but not necessarily with how to identify or name them in productive ways. These students thus become assimilable under the general heading of 'recognition of diversity,' an equation that does not always serve their learning needs well. High-stakes assessments generally keep teachers' and school administrators' attention on those students struggling to attain minimal levels of performance.

If the central goal of schooling were students' gradual mastery of valued bodies of knowledge then it would be demonstrable progress through those bodies of knowledge that would form the fundamental organisational dynamic of schooling rather than age. The challenge for a Policy Statement on the Education of Gifted Students is to move toward more achievement, and away from age-norming, as the driving dynamic of educational organisation. Serious attention to the identification and education of gifted students can offer policy makers and educational practitioners productive and challenging ways to move educational theory and practice away from lock-step age-norming.

At the heart of public education is a core aim to provide all young people with intellectual and practical preparation to "shape and participate in new and complex social, cultural and economic" aspects of contemporary Australian life (Education Queensland, 2001: 1). This preparation includes but goes beyond intellectual, academic concerns: It incorporates the social, aesthetic, emotional and moral competencies that increasingly complex societies call upon. Offering these sophisticated domains of preparation to all students puts demands on public school systems that exceed those facing education providers and systems that can select their clientele. These demands are intensified by the growing diversities that characterise contemporary Australian society, in particular the cultural, linguistic, social and economic circumstances that affect the resources young people bring to school (as described in Education Queensland's *Literate Futures* statement, Luke, Freebody & Land, 2000).

Young Queenslanders come to school with differing degrees of readiness to capitalise on the learning experiences that schools conventionally provide. This differentiated school readiness shows itself in the variations among students that educators find to be a perennial and conspicuous aspect of modern schooling – among them, variations in dispositions and motivation to learn, in physical condition, in knowledge of the culture, in cognitive and intellectual functioning

and styles, in interactions with adults and peers, in knowledge of and proficiency in public Australian English, and in the values that schooling calls upon. Depending on the priorities of individual systems and schools, these variations may or may not come to have significant consequences for students' success at school.

It is the specific workings of a system or an institution that make some categories of students both visible and actionable, and thus render their neglect professionally accountable. The simple point here is that students identifiable as gifted need to be seen as members of an actionable category, and thereby, responsiveness to their education an accountable matter.

At its most general level, then, we can consider the core business of a public education system to be the analysis and recognition of consequential variations among students, and the systematic development of responsive and flexible educational provisions that are effective for those students. Put simply, public schools are mandated to be aware of, to recognise faithfully and systematically, and to respond to the educational needs of all students.

We turn now to the recommendations that the review team consider to arise from the consultation process and from the analyses of the data provided in Chapter 5. The organising headings used in that chapter – issues around cultural considerations, the context of gifted education, and the capabilities of systems, schools and teachers – serve as the general interpretive frame for these recommendations.

## Recommendations

### *Recommendation 1*

**That Education Queensland more explicitly integrate the education of gifted students into its current policy initiatives.**

There needs to be a higher visibility of issues related to actual and potential exceptional capability in Education Queensland's recent policy initiatives, in particular the New Basics and Productive Pedagogies projects, the QSE 2010 framework, and the Learning Development Centres system of professional development. These initiatives are partly motivated by the same concerns expressed and advocated in the research and professional literature on gifted and talented education.

For instance, the *Queensland State Education 2010* document named the following among its commitments and goals for education in Queensland:

- develop a new model for supporting schools that will:
  - help them to meet the needs of students from a diversity of complex backgrounds;
  - enable all young people to achieve success at school;
- “provide special assistance and targeted programs to gifted and talented students” (p. 16);
- “an emphasis is on achieving personal best rather than passing or failing” (p. 8);
- “teachers in state schools will increasingly be involved in the design of relevant, inclusive, flexible, intellectually challenging and innovative learning experiences and assessment strategies” (p. 21);
- “schools must be flexible enough to accommodate the individual learning needs of different students” (p.8);
- “schools need to differentiate” (p. 8);
- “they need a new and more flexible model for managing learning” (p. 10);
- “all schools should be able to develop distinctive approaches ... that are innovative responses to the identified needs of their students” (p. 19);
- “equity programs will focus on the right for all students to access education that leads to learning outcomes consistent with their potential” (p. 17);

It is important to place the opportunities for exceptional students, including those not necessarily performing at consistently high levels, at the forefront of the trials and evaluations related to these initiatives, and the professional development programs associated with them. It is also important for school personnel that new syllabus guidelines be supplemented by a ‘core-business’ statement that provides a common set of concerns and commitments across the curricular domains. This statement, currently provided with respect to literacy and numeracy issues, should as well foreground the education gifted students.

### ***Recommendation 2***

**That the policy alert Queensland educators more emphatically to the range of additional, provisions – identification, and extension and acceleration opportunities –available within the terms of the current policy.**

It is important to reassert the legitimacy of these additional provisions, and their potential consequentiality for gifted students, and to clarify for district and school staff the significance of these options and the need to exploit them as part of a whole-school program for catering for the diversity of their students. Equally important is the need for schools to have a range of curricular and organisational options at their disposal, understood by all staff and by parents, and routinely used in planning programs as well as in discussions about effective provision. The

current Policy begins with the assertion that Education Queensland “requires that schools and regions provide appropriate services for gifted students,” but it is clear from our Review that this ‘requirement’ is commonly taken to be a ‘suggestion,’ that the suggestion can be enacted in a range of often unaccountable ways, and that failure to take up the suggestion in an accountable way has few consequences for schools or regions.

The ‘watering down’ or neglect of provision for gifted students is a matter of stimulus, support and accountability. All three need to combine to offer rich opportunities for educators if the system is to make supportable advances in students’ learning.

With respect to Recommendations 1 and 2, the following issues arise from our consultations:

- the visibility of the Policy;
- support of the Policy with clear frameworks for action and planning;
- its mandatory status;
- the role of executive staff in provision, dissemination and accountability;
- school action plans;
- supplementary support staff;
- development of networks for dissemination and the generation of learning communities, principally through enhanced support for the LDCs - Gifted and Talented;
- liaison with tertiary institutions aimed at enhancing the pre- and in-service knowledge of the profession in the areas of Gifted Education.

Recommendations 3 and 4 call for the establishment of two short-term working parties. Common to both of these working parties should be: 1) a prominent researcher/teacher educator in the area of Gifted Education in the Chair, and 2) the Senior Education Officer, Gifted Education, and 3) the President (or nominee) of the Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children. Other suggested membership is provided under the relevant recommendation, and both working parties should have the power to co-opt *ad hoc*. These are consultative projects whose short-term nature indicates a focus on the achievement of enhanced visibility and coherent, supportable practice. One of the main aims of these working parties will be to provide a rich context for the new Policy statement, including the context of its supporting documents and archives, that can together make genuine steps forward in the education of gifted students.

### ***Recommendation 3***

That Education Queensland establish, for a six-month period, a working party to collect and plan research resources relating to Gifted Education.

This working party should:

- collect an archive of relevant research on gifted education that directly informs both policy and practice, including case-studies of best practice, and drawing in the first instance on projects undertaken by the LDCs - Gifted and Talented Education;
- in particular, locate research and development projects that provide guidelines on the relationships between educational inputs (training, resources, special provisions) and learning and achievement outcomes, so that reliable estimates of value-for-money interventions can be supported; again, the resources of the LDCs - Gifted and Talented provide a starting point for this function;
- collect and, where necessary, devise a battery of trial quantitative and qualitative assessments that will allow Queensland educators to identify exceptional students; and
- develop research programs that will answer straightforward questions about education for gifted students such as:
  - What data currently exist concerning the profiles and distribution patterns of gifted students and those identified as gifted in Queensland?
  - How are contemporary data concerning prevalence and demographic profile of gifted students being collected and analysed to ensure an appropriate breadth and scope of provision?
  - What evidence is there of positive or negative outcomes for gifted students involved in various initiatives?
  - To what extent are the needs of gifted students from other special needs or at-risk groups being met (Aboriginal and Torres Strait students, students in socio-economic disadvantage, learning disabled students, students with sensory impairment, students in remote regions, non-English-speaking background students, students with refugee status, and so on)?
  - What strategies and approaches are currently implemented to meet the needs of students identified as exceptionally gifted who may require distinctive provision?
  - What beliefs and assumptions do teachers hold that impact on provisioning strategies, and what processes are effective in enhancing understandings about gifted students?
  - What channels of communication currently inform professionals about gifted education, and how can these channels be enhanced?

The membership of this working party should include: 1) an experienced member of the teaching and/or administrative staff of the LDC - Gifted and Talented, network; 2) the Head (or nominee) of the New Basics Project; 3) an Education Queensland Officer with significant carriage of the QSE-2010 initiative; 4) a senior Officer from the Queensland Studies Authority.

#### ***Recommendation 4***

**That Education Queensland establish, for a six-month period, a working party to collect and plan the dissemination of classroom resources for use with exceptional students, and to facilitate the operation of the Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented.**

This working party, drawing in the first instance on projects undertaken by the LDCs - Gifted and Talented, should:

- collect print and electronic resources directly aimed at assisting teachers in the education of gifted students;
- design effective and efficient dissemination strategies for these materials. It is an imperative that teachers across the state have opportunities to “know” what a gifted student is through good professional development linked to demonstrably effective cases;
- devise settings that will exploit the Learning Development Centre structure in stimulating novel professional exchange on the topic of Gifted Education; and
- enhance current levels of support for the co-ordination of the Learning Development Centres - Gifted and Talented in five respects:
  - in optimising the learning experiences of gifted students through enhanced whole-class or special activities;
  - in helping the Centres to become focal points for liaison between teachers, resource developers and researchers;
  - in maximising the outreach functions of the Centres, exploring new ways of disseminating their work to other schools and districts;
  - in establishing pathways for educators who wish to specialise in gifted education, as a way of preserving and accumulating system expertise; and
  - in providing a setting for specialised pre-service experience as preferred sites for interested students in their practicum blocks.

Educators working in the field of giftedness seem to have made little progress in widespread dissemination of knowledge and good practice. Yet many of the key ideas in the field are currently increasingly advocated in mainstream educational practice and curriculum design. The educational benefits for gifted students from their school experiences will be achieved largely by regular teachers teaching in responsive and challenging ways. This indicates that curriculum policy makers are critical in the process. Education Queensland needs to assemble and articulate

strong statements that demonstrate how curriculum frameworks and policies are enacted in ways that ensure appropriate challenge for all students, including gifted students. A policy that includes general curriculum planners and designers is likely to have more appropriate and durable impact than one that asserts another responsibility for teachers and principals in apparent curricular and policy isolation.

The membership of this working party should include: 1) the President of the Queensland Primary School Principals Association (or nominee); 2) the President of the Queensland Secondary School Principals Association (or nominee); 3) – 4) two teachers with experience working in multicultural and disadvantaged education sites; 5) a teacher currently working in an LDC - Gifted and Talented.

Both working parties described above need to identify and capitalise on the specialist skills and knowledge that exist among the Learning Development Centres and elsewhere within Education Queensland, as well as drawing on leadership from the community and professional associations to ensure that the outcomes of these committees are durable, clear and accessible, and coherently connected to other policy and curriculum initiatives.

### ***Recommendation 5***

**That, following this six-month period, the deliberations of these working parties be drawn together by a small group that rewrites the current policy.**

This rewrite should:

- reflect contemporary theorising and research on gifted education, including a clearer but more generative definition of this category of student;
- explicitly connect the policy statement to the archive of resource materials, including clear indications of their availability;
- explicitly co-ordinate the policy with other Education Queensland policy initiatives; and
- provide clear guidelines for individual schools in their development of a whole-school gifted policy, to reflect their local settings and clientele.

The Policy statement needs to be brief and usable; the guidelines need to be detailed and to provide clear directions for the processes of identification, differentiation, acceleration, and structural change (e.g., multi-age, vertical curriculum, ability grouping); and the final element of the program is the development of an archive of cases and exemplars.

This co-ordinating group should include the three members common to the two working parties, and other participants they deem to be necessary for the rework of the Policy and its enhanced implementation. This latter category should include representation from the Queensland Teachers' Union.

### ***Recommendation 6***

That one of the features of this rewritten policy be the inclusion of specific guidelines for public and system accountability, and an emphasis on the importance of these accountability procedures.

These accountability procedures should make the education of gifted students more visible in schools. They should entail clear statements about mainstream and special provisions, and should form part of the schools' responsibilities under the three-year Schools Improvement and Accounting Framework, and be a routine element of schools' Annual Operating Plans.

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