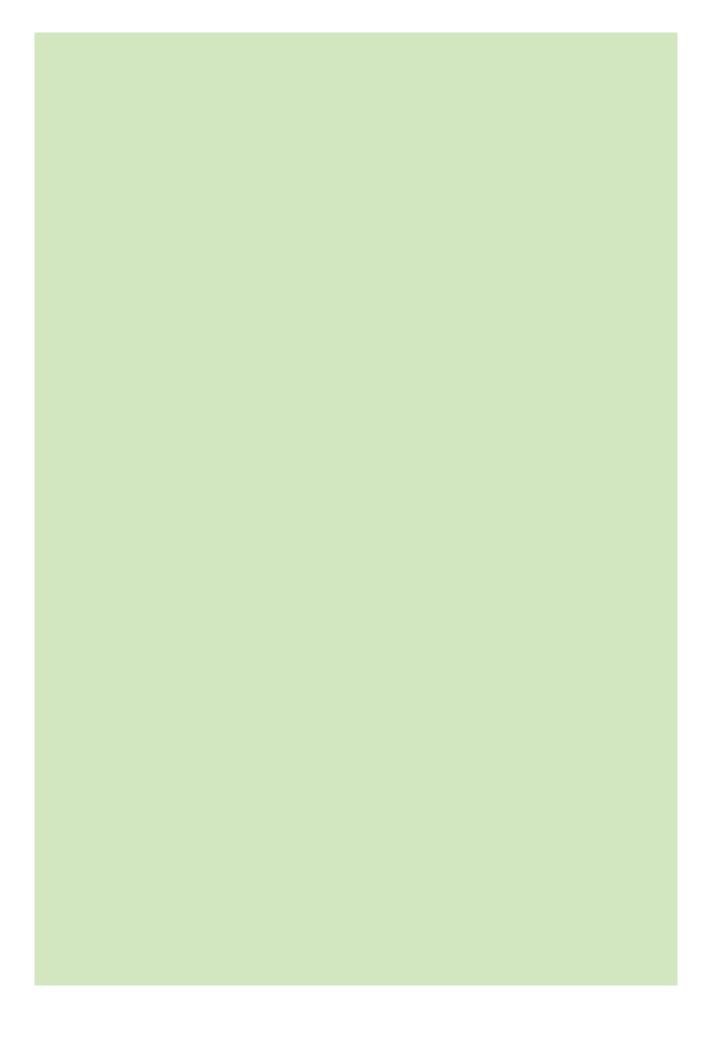# Committee of Chairs of Academic Boards/Senates of Universities in NSW and the ACT

REPORT OF THE CONSULTATION ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NOVEMBER 2005

The 'Key Findings' of the report are attached.

Chapter 6

Key Findings

CHAPTER 6
KEY FINDINGS

The input by over 28,000 teachers, parents, students, leaders and the broader community of NSW has made compelling reading. There have been very strongly expressed views. The underlying feature of the consultation has been the pride so many in public education and training feel and their desire to ensure it grows and progresses. This compels us to take stock of our current situation and build for the future.

For schools, there is little doubt that public education is confronted with great challenges. The market share statistics and falling demography will inevitably mean change. The simple view that more funding will provide an answer may be partly true. This consultation has shown there is a deep seated concern that the DET and its schools need to change the way they operate. Schools need to be given the capacity to innovate and shape themselves, with their communities to better meet local needs.

This is not to say there is support for a scheme that lets "a thousand flowers bloom". Quite the reverse: there is strong support for explicit and clear frameworks within which schools must operate, supported by strong accountability and monitoring procedures. Within these frameworks, schools should be given the capacity to grow and develop. This is certainly borne out by comparison with nearly all first world countries and states. In NSW, public education should not expect to prosper if we do not develop a more contemporary system.

The consultation demonstrated the value people place on TAFE NSW and the pride of its staff in their organisation. For TAFE, the issues of flexibility and accessibility were highlighted by students and industry. The demand for further improvements in the quality of teaching and in customer service was clear. What was also clear was the need for TAFE to be able to operate in a business framework which allows it to prioritise its products and services, in consultation with its customers. To be sustainable, TAFE must be able to meet the prioritised needs of its customers and be resourced to do so.

This chapter lists 21 *Key findings*.

The list of *Key findings* follows for consideration.

Good Teaching

Key findings

Quality student learning outcomes are dependent upon quality teachers who are themselves lifelong learners. Quality teachers need support from a whole of DET philosophy that values career-long professional learning for all staff.

School and TAFE teachers, support staff and managers, schools and colleges, regions, Institutes and State Office share the responsibility for career-long professional learning. Support for the continual improvement of teaching through reflection, professional dialogue, discussion of teaching practice and networking between schools and TAFE colleges needs to be provided.

Pre-service and in-service professional learning programs should be developed in collaboration with universities while for beginning teachers and teachers new to executive positions, there is a need to provide mentoring programs to ensure universal and targeted professional support for staff in new positions.

The conflict between the advantage to teachers of professional development during school hours and the ensuing disruption to student leaning needs to be resolved through flexible delivery models including on-line learning, on-site in-classroom programs and peer development programs. There is also a need for longer-term professional development programs including longitudinal action research and access to a wide range of courses and on-line services and learning materials.

Teachers need to determine their own professional development needs in consultation with their manager and within the context of their school or college and local community. Evidence of ongoing participation in recognised professional learning programs should be required of all aspirants for promotion.

Schools, TAFE colleges and the system must support teachers, support staff and managers as they continually develop their skills and knowledge.

Early Childhood Years

Key findings

All children should have access to a quality prior to school education for at least the year before school and we should work to achieve this aim. The needs of children are greatest in areas of high Aboriginal population and in areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage. The number of DET preschools should be increased particularly for these children.

The current transition to school or orientation programs are welcomed by school communities but need to be enhanced to better meet the individual needs of children and give them the best possible start to school. Transition to school programs should be coordinated across the prior to school and school settings and be offered over an extended period. These programs need to involve the children's families and include specific information that will assist families to support children at school. The school, in working with the preschools and childcare centres, should be aware of, and have developed plans for, the individual learning and support needs of children prior to entry to school. This is particularly important for children with disabilities.

Greater coordination is required between prior to school centres and primary schools. There are potential benefits for children's transition to school if the preschool or childcare centre is located within the grounds of public schools.

There is too great a gap in the ages of children on entry to school, making it difficult for younger children to adjust and for teachers to meet the range of needs of children across these early years. There are a range of views about the best possible age for children to start school but generally the belief is that the starting age for school should be raised.

As the DET and the Department of Community Services currently have responsibility for preschool education, greater coordination is needed to better address children's learning needs in the years before school and prepare them for learning in school. There are divergent views about what children should learn prior to school and in the first years of school. There is, however, a need to better align the preschool curriculum and the curriculum for the early years of school so that learning is continuous.

There should be an interagency approach to children's services before school and within schools. The Schools as Community Centres interagency program has been greatly valued by those school communities that have been involved. Given the success of the program, there would be benefits for children and their families if the school is the focus of the community, and the centre for a range of local government and non-government services. Support should be provided for the further development of interagency programs within school communities with the greatest need.

Primary School Years

Key findings

Primary teachers are seeking greater stability in syllabus implementation. They need time to become familiar with the requirements of each key learning area and to develop successful programs that will meet the needs of their students.

Since the six key learning area syllabuses have been in primary schools, teachers have not received information to clarify curriculum requirements. In an attempt to meet all requirements of syllabuses many teachers have felt overwhelmed and the lack of flexibility has made it difficult to meet the particular needs of school communities.

The solutions to a "crowded" curriculum are not simple. There are divergent views about how to "un-crowd" the curriculum and about what should or should not be part of the primary curriculum. A range of solutions is required, including clarifying curriculum requirements for pubic schools and providing targeted professional development and support for the integration of key learning areas. Other suggested solutions include reducing class sizes from Year 3 to Year 6 and providing some specialist teachers in primary schools.

Within clear guidelines, schools need to be able to make decisions about the curriculum that are in the best interests of their students.

Many parents feel that they do not understand the curriculum, how their child is assessed and what is being reported. They want to be able to assist in the education of their child and want reports that are regular, clear, honest and in simple English. The issue of homework is of concern to some parents. Given the impact homework can have on family life, there needs to be greater flexibility within the Homework Policy for schools to better meet the needs of students and expectations of parents.

The implementation of the recommendations from the Eltis Report should assist teachers particularly with assessing and reporting requirements. There is a need to develop a way of tracking student achievement across the primary school years and at transition points in their education so that their learning is continuous.

There are divergent views about the use of composite classes in primary schools. Notwithstanding this matter and the urgent need to address the issue of the "crowded" curriculum, there is general satisfaction with the structure of primary schools and the education that children receive in these years.

Middle Years

Key findings

Many schools have established successful programs involving a range of strategies to meet the needs and enhance the learning of students in the middle years. Many of these programs, which include support for students' transition between Year 6 and Year 7, have proved to be successful in supporting students in the middle years and helping to give them a good start to high school. They are greatly valued by their school communities.

There is a need, however, to develop a coherent and coordinated Departmental strategy around the middle years of schooling. A Departmental strategy should support successful current practices and ensure that all primary and secondary schools establish effective middle years programs.

There is currently no standard way of tracking student achievement particularly across the middle years of school. The achievements of some students entering Year 7 may not be recognised, resulting in reteaching and students feeling unchallenged and unsupported. There is support for a tracking system that can be used within and across government schools to support a continuum of learning although some people have concerns about how such a system may be used.

Effective teaching which involves students in more practical and relevant learning experiences is essential to ensure that students remain engaged in the middle years. Professional learning opportunities targeted at meeting the needs of middle years students need to be available for teachers of these years. These opportunities could include support for teachers to integrate learning across the key learning areas or subjects.

Research indicates that students in the middle years need a strong bond with supportive adults. Teachers' relationships with students during these years are very important. Some teachers would like to focus their teaching in these years of schooling although there were others who are opposed to creating specialist middle years teachers. Greater flexibility in staffing arrangements across primary and secondary school would allow teachers the option to teach across Years 5 to 8.

There are divergent views on the merits of establishing separate middle schools. Generally, schools should be encouraged to implement innovative middle years strategies. In some supportive communities this could include piloting a middle years school structure.

Secondary School Years

Key findings

Secondary schools need to be more flexible in order to meet the needs of their students.

The junior secondary curriculum needs to be freed up to allow choice, greater relevance, and an opportunity for students to participate in vocational education as well as study courses of their own choosing. Suggested solutions include: reviewing the DET's mandated additional hours of study for Years 7 to 10; developing a vocational studies elective option; and reviewing the nature and purpose of the School Certificate.

Students should be assisted to achieve their personal aspirations and goals through the provision of high quality resource materials supporting students' understanding of knowledge management and learning how to learn. Resources for teachers should be developed that ensure the effectiveness of school-based assessment tasks using standards, outcomes and innovative assessment options that report to parents in plain language. Resources should also be developed for teachers which are based around integrated units of study.

The senior secondary curriculum is seen by some to be too focused on university entrance and not meeting the needs of those students wanting other pathways, such as TAFE or employment. Expanding the scope of the HSC, especially for students unlikely to enter university from school, is seen as essential.

While co-educational comprehensive secondary schools are well supported there is a need for greater flexibility to enable consideration, at the local level, of other school models to better meet local needs.

Parents need to be provided with the information that enables them to help their children make good choices about what they do in school and beyond school.

Students 15 to 19 Years Old

Key findings

Schools and TAFE must work together in a planned and strategic way to improve the outcomes for young people and their engagement in work and study. Areas of duplication between schools and TAFE should be reviewed, particularly in relation to the delivery of vocational education to school students, and the delivery of the CGVE (School Certificate equivalent) and the Higher School Certificate to students under the age of 18.

Education and training must be relevant to the needs of 15 to 19 year olds and be structured flexibly to provide easy and equitable access to both school and TAFE. There is a need to provide flexible pathways and enable students to exercise greater control over their own learning by selecting modules and units from a range of sources within a more flexible provision. Funding arrangements for 15-19 year old students attending TAFE to undertake School Certificate equivalent and the Higher School Certificate need to be reviewed.

The current structure and requirements of the Higher School Certificate do not accommodate the needs of a significant number of post compulsory age students. The curriculum must provide more flexible educational pathways that range from completely academic to largely vocational in the context of a single, rigorous Higher School Certificate.

Students need to be supported by professionals dedicated to improving opportunities for 15 to 19 year olds. There is a need for better career counselling for students which helps them plan their futures across the full range of opportunities beyond school and assists them to make effective transitions. Students should be supported in their planning to complete their studies or for their transition to work, recognising their participation in part-time and full-time work.

Partnerships involving combinations of schools, TAFE, other government agencies, industry and community organisations, should be used to assist young people to remain engaged in education and training and to develop the skills they need to gain and keep employment. The Department needs to work with other agencies to create initiatives which will assist all young people to achieve their goals and fulfil their potential.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Key findings

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is seen as a vital tool in the learning and teaching process. The Department must have a clearly defined plan for the future development and use of ICT in schools and TAFE which: integrates ICT into quality teaching and learning; provides for appropriate levels of support and resourcing; incorporates appropriate staff training; facilitates access to new and emerging technologies; and incorporates maintenance of ICT products and systems.

School and TAFE leaders have a critical role in promoting learning and teaching with ICT in schools and colleges. There is a need for a greater emphasis on professional learning to develop competent teachers and leaders who are confident in the use of ICT in quality learning and teaching. Professional learning opportunities are also important for support and administrative staff and there needs to be an enhanced provision in the area of ICT in pre-service teacher education.

The effective use of ICT has the potential to revolutionise the learning and teaching both inside and outside the classroom and school. The Department needs to implement systems that fully exploit the capabilities of ICT in the management of students' learning and school and TAFE administrative systems.

The effective use of ICT greatly enhances the ability to personalise learning for each student in ways that have not been previously possible. There is a need to continually expand the range of e-learning materials to facilitate innovation and support personalised learning. ICT needs to be used to continually expand the choice and opportunity for school and TAFE students, particularly in remote areas of NSW.

In order for students and teachers to best use this tool, technology must be accessible and appropriate. Schools and TAFE need ICT infrastructure and systems that support student learning. There is a need to develop an anytime anywhere approach to the delivery of on-line learning materials for students, teachers, support staff and leaders.

The Principal as Expert Educational Leader

Key findings

Whatever the context of the school, responsibility for the delivery of quality education requires highly capable leadership. It is the principal who has the critical role in leading and managing change for continuous improvement and in establishing the learning culture of the school.

To ensure the continued development of expert leadership within the system, a comprehensive and multi-layered leadership strategy needs to be implemented at all levels of school, region and state. The attributes desired of leaders need to be recognised and incorporated in development programs for principals and executives.

The determination of agreed leadership performance standards was regarded as fundamental to ensuring school leaders have a clear framework against which their performance is measured. Performance standards used as part of an accountability framework for principals would provide a basis for recognition of levels of performance. Rigorous accountability needs to be in place across the system to assure parents and the community of the quality of their schools.

The level of skills, knowledge and professionalism of leaders needs to be encouraged and recognised through increased levels of autonomy, access to further study and professional visits and assigned roles in mentoring.

Leadership should be enhanced by requiring principals to achieve higher educational qualifications and accreditation. This was considered an effective means for raising the level of skills, knowledge and professionalism of school leaders.

There needs to be a major overhaul of the current system of appointment of school leaders, including a process which includes workplace observation as a more authentic way of assessing suitability and competence.

The principal's role has become increasingly complex with more accountability and less control and support. Effective systems for administrative support need to be developed to ensure the principal's primary focus is on educational leadership while providing high order school management.

What Should be the Legitimate Authority of Principals?

Key findings

There is a distinct mismatch between the level of authority and the degree of accountability required of principals. Given that principals are held accountable for school operations and performance, there is a corresponding need to give principals greater control over school resources. While a greater degree of local decision-making is a critical issue for the future of public education and training, it is important that increased flexibility and local decision-making occurs within statewide frameworks.

While not a universally held view, there was a strong sense that central to the need for a greater degree of local decision-making is for principals to have more flexibility and discretion over staffing. Capacity to design a staff profile that best meets the local needs of the school, more input into the selection of staff and changes to the current processes for dealing with inefficient staff are considered essential.

The need for increased flexibility and local decision-making extended to the design of the school's education provision and use of resources at the local level. Determining the most effective use of the school's inputs in order to achieve quality outcomes was considered by many to be essential.

An accountability framework is required to effectively monitor any increase in flexibility and responsibility entrusted to principals. This needs to be rigorous in terms of the principal's leadership and management of the school. It also needs to be inextricably linked to school level accountability in which mechanisms are in place to more effectively monitor the operations and performance of schools. This needs to be accompanied by the provision of a better level of information being publicly available so as to assure parents and the community of the quality of their schools.

Developing Leadership Capability at all Levels

Key findings

The role of leadership in developing a culture that supports teachers to create success in their classrooms reflects the strong relationship between quality leadership and quality schools. The principal must play a key role in developing an inclusive, team approach to leadership and decision-making at all levels within a school. The leadership team needs to be developed in order to undertake the leadership functions in the school.

A leadership strategy is considered to be fundamental to ensure a coordinated approach to leadership, with provision for a range of activities delivered in flexible ways. A Leadership Centre was suggested by respondents as a key element for the implementation of such a strategy. The importance of continued funding for professional learning and a more integrated approach to development and accountability were stated as being central to improving leadership capacity.

There is a need for a range of leadership activities for staff at all levels. The significant role played by school administrative and support staff and the need to provide further development was widely recognised by respondents.

At the executive level, it was acknowledged that while staff must take responsibility for their own learning, innovative strategies need to be implemented to encourage broader participation in leadership development activities. A leadership capability framework is essential for guiding the development of staff and for recognising levels of performance.

In relation to principals, suggestions focused on strategies to support newly appointed principals, to use the expertise of experienced and retired principals and to reinvigorate long-serving principals. Mentoring was a consistent theme.

The relationship between schools, regions and state offices was raised in relation to leadership. A more collaborative effort between schools, regions and state office would enhance leadership in schools and make better use of expertise.

Succession planning was considered to be an important responsibility at school, regional and state levels. Identification of future school leaders and individual development plans should be a priority to make certain prospective leaders are supported and provided with opportunities to practise leadership.

Organisational Culture

Key findings

The central finding to emerge regarding organisational culture was the need for schools to have the capacity to shape themselves within a state-wide policy framework supported by a clear vision and statement of purpose for public education.

There is a desire for schools to be able to grow and develop themselves so that they can more adequately meet local needs. The current centralised system and the industrial regulations governing working conditions do not provide the autonomy or flexibility necessary to allow decision-making at the local level in relation to a range of key school operations.

A policy framework that gives schools an opportunity to meet system requirements while allowing them to adapt to local circumstances is needed. This will require a review, in partnership with stakeholders, of the philosophies, policies and practices of the DET to build a statewide framework within which local decision-making takes place with clear responsibilities and accountabilities.

Policy should be driven by a coherent vision and statement of purpose for public education, with agreed and shared goals, backed by the commitment of both the Government and the Department. The promotion of a strong direction for public education and advocacy for public schools and staff in general, was an underlying theme.

To ensure delivery of these important fundamentals to public education, more efficient and effective connections need to be made between schools and the regional and state staff who support them. State office and regional staff need to be regularly seen and connected to the experiences and practices of schools to ensure they are knowledgeable about them. There is a need for more inclusive decision-making processes and the building of professional networks to ensure an appropriate balance between autonomy and systemic responsibility and to develop a sense of inclusion and trust among all staff.

The system would benefit from improved communications systems which better provide for the needs of schools, parents and the system through the use of new technology and in a timely and balanced way.

Community Partnerships Enhancing Learning

Key findings

There is evidence that when parents and community work effectively together with schools, students' learning is enhanced. Parents want to be involved in their children's education but many find it difficult to find the time to engage in school activities.

Parents want unambiguous and regular communication about their child's progress with minimal educational jargon. Many parents are seeking a more comprehensive use of modern communication technologies and strategies but also recognise that there needs to be a variety of forms of communication to ensure that no family is excluded. While many schools have excellent communications systems, others need to evaluate their systems and partnership-building practices.

Parents and students want a greater say in school decision-making and to have opportunities to provide feedback on their schools. There is a need for an overarching statewide policy framework to be developed that ensures that staff, parents, students and community are included in school decision-making. This framework must allow flexibility for schools to implement systems that meet local needs.

There is support by many people for schools to become the 'hub' of their communities and to build on the opportunities provided within the community to advance student learning. Schools need to make better use of their local community assets such as using community volunteers to work as mentors and coaches in schools and seek engagement of local business and industry in the development of relevant education programs.

There are benefits for students and their families when Government and community agencies work in partnership with schools, building the concept of full service schools. These partnerships have already proved to be successful particularly for the early childhood years in low socio-economic areas, providing early intervention activities and parenting support. Co-locating community agencies and support services, where possible, in school premises would support these partnerships for the benefit of students and their families.

Meeting Local Needs

Key findings

The 'one size fits all' approach to school staffing needs to be abandoned and replaced by a system that better meets the needs of individual schools and their communities. The new system requires a redesign of DET procedures and communications to recognise the professionalism of principals and staff and their capacity for decision-making.

Schools need to have greater control over the staffing profile of their school as well as the selection and employment of staff. The design of a new staffing system must ensure school needs are met by enabling the appointment of staff with the required qualifications, skills and expertise best suited to the local situation. It needs to support and encourage staff through the provision of opportunities to operate in a range of schools as desired. It requires the development of new school resource allocation processes which provide flexibility in staffing structures, including the determination of a staffing profile tailored to school needs.

The high turnover of school staff in some areas such as western NSW and south western Sydney must be addressed through a new and innovative scheme that will ensure experienced teachers and leaders are attracted to and retained in hard to staff schools. The scheme should enable greater flexibility in the recruitment of staff; provide a range of incentives, including financial and career development opportunities; and promote the positives of teaching in hard-to-staff schools. Schools in such areas should be set up as models of innovation, quality teaching and quality leadership.

Schools need to be responsive and flexible and able to configure and allocate available resources to best meet their needs. Schools and their communities need to be able to determine the profile of public education which best meets community needs including the types of schools, the relationship between and among schools and TAFE, the hours of operation and the role of other government and community agencies. This will involve more flexible work practices which allow variations to school organisation and operations. Such arrangements will support and encourage partnerships between schools and with TAFE to enhance curriculum provision and to reduce disjunctions at current transition points. A whole of government approach in which schools are working closely with other agencies such as Centrelink, NSW Health, Department of Community Services and TAFE NSW, often at the one site, is needed.

Developing, Supporting and Rewarding Quality Teachers

Key findings

Pre-service teacher education programs need to reflect the current role of teachers in schools including managing student learning for groups and for individuals. The preparation must include an understanding of the values of public education; the development of an extensive knowledge of the diverse needs of learners and techniques to meet these needs; and an understanding of the changing role of teachers within the knowledge society of the future.

Teacher education needs to include more professional experience, through both practicum and internships, to take place in a range of schools. This will provide practical experience in teaching students with different learning needs and styles, from a range of backgrounds and in a variety of settings. It should equip graduate teachers to better meet the challenges of real life situations in schools.

There need to be stronger links between the Department and universities to ensure that teacher education is relevant and well connected to public schools. Current teacher qualification requirements need to be reconsidered to determine whether they meet the needs of contemporary schooling. Teacher education should be designed to enable graduate teachers to meet the professional teaching standards in the Institute of Teachers' framework.

There is a need to ensure quality teachers are valued and supported by the Department and their school. A range of formal and informal strategies to achieve this is essential. Strategies needing consideration include appropriate incentives and rewards, acknowledgment by the Department and by their community, an opportunity to perform higher duties with allowances, and higher education sponsorship and targeted transfers.

Ineffective teachers need to be identified quickly and mechanisms put in place to provide support. An emphasis on developing teachers earlier in their careers through school-based mentoring and training is necessary to improve the standard of practice. In cases where teachers continue to experience difficulties, procedures for dealing with such situations need to be simplified to ensure student learning is not disrupted.

Environments for Learning

Key findings

The physical presentation of a school is critical in attracting enrolments and maintaining school morale and image in the wider community. Schools and their communities need greater discretion in the management of school infrastructure, including maintenance and minor capital works.

While the design of modern facilities meets expectations and is acknowledged as being of high standard there was concern that much of the building stock is outdated and does not meet current and future needs. There is a need for the planned, progressive upgrading of facilities.

The Department's efforts to refurbish facilities of historic and heritage value and the quality of recently constructed facilities were applauded, but present infrastructure modelling standards lack flexibility. There is a need for the development of alternative, flexible building code standards to enable adaptation to local circumstances. Sustainability options in facility design and construction should be promoted.

Joint use of facilities, to avoid duplication between schools and TAFE, is advocated along with greater use of facilities for community focused education and out of hours use.

Economies in capital works costs, more creative use of existing facilities and more effective ways to conduct maintenance programs are needed to extend the value of each dollar spent. Effective asset management which includes procedures to better rationalise under-utilised and excess facilities is required to balance available funds against demand.

Exploration of alternative strategies for funding and accelerating school building, refurbishment and maintenance programs is also needed.

TAFE Teachers

Key findings

TAFE teachers who combine high quality teaching with high level knowledge of and skills in their industry area are strongly valued. Industry currency is equally valued. Students now and into the future must gain the knowledge and skills they need for their target industry. A succession strategy is needed to ensure that TAFE has the staff necessary to achieve this.

Teachers should have the skills and flexibility to respond to the individual needs of students within diverse groups, using diverse teaching modes, including workplace delivery. Ongoing teacher training and systematised return to industry processes are needed to support this. New teachers should have the industry currency and appropriate qualifications to ensure TAFE's ongoing capability now and into the future. Gaining qualitative feedback from students, for example through focus groups, was said to be a key method of gathering information to improve students' learning experiences and outcomes.

The importance of Head Teachers in establishing the quality culture of their sections and in the management and educational leadership of their staff was emphasised in the consultation. Managers need a range of skills including interpersonal, communication and business skills. Effective leadership is critical for the ongoing business of TAFE.

TAFE Services to Industry

Key findings

One of the most important messages about industry in NSW is that it is not homogeneous. The issues for industry in rural NSW are not the same as the issues for industries in regional or metropolitan areas. The issues for large national and multi-national enterprises are not the same as the issues for small and medium enterprises. Partnerships between TAFE and industry were seen as a key strategy in ensuring TAFE delivers what industry needs and in providing students with access to cutting edge industry facilities and practices.

Industry at all levels wants more efficient and effective ways of communicating with TAFE. They want a single point of contact for each industry staffed by people with industry knowledge and expertise, to provide information about TAFE products and services for each industry area

Creating account managers for major clients was a strategy proposed by industry for improving customer service. The needs of small and medium enterprises and of industry in rural and regional NSW should be taken into account, in terms of both communication and products and services. Strengthening TAFE's use of industry feedback is important in strategically improving the quality of products and services. It is important to include small and medium enterprises in this process. Industry and TAFE staff want TAFE to actively seek feedback from industry on its performance by implementing a broad range of measures to evaluate TAFE's services, in a context of continuous improvement.

Addressing Skills Shortages

Key findings

Skills shortages are a critical issue for NSW and Australia. Apprenticeships are a key strategy for addressing skills shortages and engaging people in work and training. Apprenticeships need to be more attractive, both to young people and to employers.

Industry said that the current 'one size fits all' apprenticeship system is not useful and some industries called for a reduction in the amount of time taken for an apprenticeship. The challenge is to configure a flexible apprenticeship system that increases the engagement of industry (large, medium and small) in the training of apprentices. Many people believe a more flexible apprenticeship system is needed and are not aware of recent developments in this area.

Industry and the community want to see flexible entry points which recognise prior learning and industry experience; flexible delivery patterns which meet the needs of industry and apprentices; and more mature age apprenticeships. They also wanted to see the promotion of apprenticeships to the community as pathways to careers.

TAFE Services for Students

Key findings

People want more targeted information about TAFE courses and modules and related employment pathways. There is a need to ensure students are provided with the support they need to assist them to enrol in the programs and patterns of studies, including individual modules or groups of modules, that best meet their chosen pathways and accommodate the other pressures on their lives.

There is a need to review and enhance career guidance, vocational training and TAFE NSW pre-enrolment information and counselling to improve current career services across schools and TAFE.

Better information for school students about TAFE is particularly important. Enrolling in the wrong course was described as distressing and discouraging for the individual and wasteful for all concerned. It was felt that the efficiencies derived from a more effective system would offset the cost.

The use of destination surveys to gain feedback about work opportunities and career pathways is a key element of providing improved information for students.

Promoting the Value of TAFE

Key findings

By their responses, people showed that they had limited knowledge of TAFE's services, products and achievements. TAFE staff feel that if industry and the community had a greater knowledge of TAFE's products and services, they would be better able to make use of them.

Closer links with industry and the community would allow TAFE to create stronger and more productive partnerships, as well as providing the means for better information exchange. These links provide opportunities for students to find mentors and to gain work experience in current operating environments. They also provide opportunities for staff to maintain industry currency and for industry to inform TAFE about its needs and for TAFE to show industry the products and services it can provide.

Effective use of evaluation and customer satisfaction measures is needed for systematic and strategic quality improvement.

A Robust and Sustainable TAFE

Key findings

A strong viable TAFE NSW needs a clear, stable and ongoing commitment from the community, industry and government to resource and support it.

There were differing views about how TAFE's services should be costed and who should pay. The different users – students, government and industry – were all called on to contribute. Increasing demands on TAFE's resources, such as increased flexibility and cutting edge industry equipment, are clear. TAFE also continues to have the most generous fee exemption policy in Australia and this is strongly supported. TAFE will need to operate increasingly as a business to remain viable and will need to work more closely with its customers to prioritise its products and services.

Industry in particular wanted TAFE to operate more as a business. They called for TAFE to develop a three year operational budget framework for TAFE. They also wanted TAFE to undertake longer-term planning and suggested a longer budgeting cycle would support this.

Customers want TAFE to be more flexible in meeting the needs of both industry and individual students. Students need to be able to build and upgrade their skills through industry-relevant training that is easily accessible and consistent in quality. Customers want TAFE to provide a broader product range that is more closely aligned to employment opportunities, particularly in the local or regional area, with current and relevant support materials. Partnerships with industry, community agencies and other educational providers can improve services while increasing efficiencies.