

Chapter 16

COMMONWEALTH

Role of the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth's role in school education arises from its interest in pursuing the government's broad national social and economic agenda to secure better educational outcomes from schooling.

In 1999, the Commonwealth continued to seek improvements to the outcomes for all young Australians by providing support for education systems and schools through its funding programs and through policy development, research and analysis of nationally significant educational issues.

Consistent with this broad objective, the Commonwealth's highest priorities for 1999 were:

- the finalisation of a new set of national goals for schooling in Australia covering the years into the next century
- the release of data on the performance of primary school students against literacy and numeracy benchmarks
- the improvement in educational outcomes of Indigenous Australian students.

Other significant priority areas were improved choice and diversity in schooling and the expansion of curriculum options in post-compulsory schooling to accommodate the interests and abilities of the full range of senior secondary students, especially vocational education and training (VET) in schools.

In line with this emphasis on educational outcomes, the Commonwealth continued its support for international studies of student achievement, notably through the work of

the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the continuing work on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

The Commonwealth administers its policies and programs for schools and students through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). Student income support programs are administered by Centrelink, the Commonwealth authority which provides social security, income assistance and employment assistance services.

Commonwealth funding

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided around \$4.56 billion in specific-purpose payments for Australian schools and students. As illustrated in Figure 16.1 and Tables 16.1, 16.2, 16.3, 16.4 and 16.5, this comprised:

- \$3.53 billion for general recurrent grants (representing 77 per cent of expenditure)
- \$451 million for targeted programs (10 per cent), including \$182 million in grants for literacy and \$112 million for special education
- \$306 million for capital grants (7 per cent)
- \$183 million for Indigenous programs (4 per cent), including the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) and the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) Programme
- \$87 million for student support through Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and ABSTUDY (2 per cent).

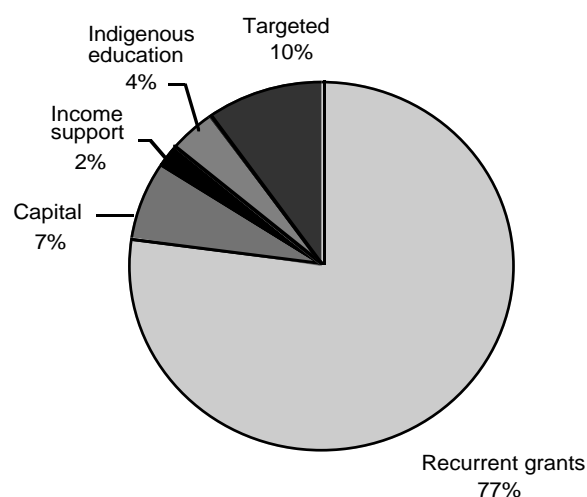
**Table 16.1 Commonwealth Grants for schools, by program and category of school, States and Territories, 1999
(cash expenditure) (a) (\$000)**

<i>Program</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>	<i>Australia</i>
<i>Government schools</i>									
General Recurrent	372,255	260,361	213,927	117,105	84,275	32,489	19,502	13,822	1,113,735
Grants to Schools for Literacy	50,403	29,849	18,909	10,620	10,609	3,574	1,070	2,583	127,617
Students with Disabilities	3,110	1,652	1,292	730	1,038	303	148	379	8,651
ESL – New Arrivals	13,436	8,481	2,554	2,284	2,909	319	287	316	30,586
Special Education School Support	11,785	11,411	8,644	4,859	3,053	1,697	698	693	42,840
Country Areas	4,762	1,785	3,737	2,487	1,702	466	0	814	15,753
National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools	10,040	6,828	5,726	3,188	2,356	839	517	375	29,869
Priority Languages Incentive	1,013	915	326	140	186	101	78	4	2,762
Community Languages	3,474	2,352	643	370	492	27	106	40	7,503
Capital	75,230	51,126	40,949	22,293	17,405	6,205	3,904	2,790	219,902
Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme	10,601	3,811	21,447	15,586	7,465	1,233	535	17,567	77,821
Total	556,109	378,572	318,153	179,662	131,489	47,253	26,845	39,382	1,677,039
<i>Non-government schools</i>									
General Recurrent (including STEA)	796,744	644,685	440,339	232,551	180,809	49,619	52,481	21,176	2,418,404
Grants to Schools for Literacy	17,634	15,101	5,102	3,781	3,341	647	538	564	46,708
Students with Disabilities	2,417	2,595	825	463	1,178	200	222	41	7,942
ESL – New Arrivals	1,497	933	348	603	174	50	4	4	3,611
<i>Special Education</i>									
School Support	12,364	8,765	2,894	3,559	1,182	619	607	362	30,352
Centre Support	6,941	4,584	5,112	511	2,895	86	396	30	20,554
Centre Support – Capital	293	187	285	0	80	182	0	0	1,027
Total Special Education	19,598	13,536	8,291	4,070	4,156	888	1,003	392	51,933
Country Areas	1,072	495	649	330	209	100	0	99	2,954
National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools	4,057	3,420	2,123	1,174	934	279	283	97	12,367
Priority Languages Incentive	707	709	295	190	197	37	56	4	2,194
Community Languages	1,059	3,905	384	181	154	5	112	0	5,801
Capital	28,524	24,253	14,575	7,956	6,360	2,093	2,006	682	86,450
Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme	11,646	1,428	8,315	9,738	2,948	736	1,421	8,806	45,038
Total	884,954	711,060	481,244	261,037	200,461	54,653	58,126	31,865	2,683,401
<i>Joint programs</i>									
National Literacy Strategies and Projects	9	422	801	308	262	50	271	36	2,159
National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools	0	20	144	178	50	150	144	124	810
Full Service Schools	4,073	2,431	2,901	1,061	1,132	708	389	354	13,049
Total	4,082	2,873	3,846	1,547	1,444	907	803	514	16,018
<i>All programs</i>									
Total	1,445,145	1,092,505	803,244	442,246	333,395	102,813	85,774	71,761	4,376,458

(a) 1999 Programme year cash expenditure for 1999 as at 30 June 2000.

Source: Commonwealth DETYA

Figure 16.1 Commonwealth funding on schools and students, by program, 1999



Source: Commonwealth DETYA

Figure 16.1 provides a proportional breakdown of Commonwealth funding for schools and students by major program.

Of the \$4.38 billion of grants for schools spent under the *States Grants Act 1999* and the *Indigenous Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989*, the government sector received \$1.68 billion and the non-government sector \$2.68 billion. A further \$16 million was spent on joint national programs benefiting both sectors. Table 16.1 shows how this was distributed to government and non-government authorities, by State.

Commonwealth recurrent funding for government schools was provided through block grants calculated according to the numbers of students at each level of schooling. The rates for government schools in 1999 were \$419 per primary school student and \$618 per secondary school student. Additional recurrent funding of \$87 per primary student and \$126 per secondary student was available for eligible students with disabilities.

Support for the recurrent costs of non-government schools was also provided on a per capita basis. Non-government schools were classified into one of 12 funding categories according to need. Category 1 schools receive the lowest level of per capita funding and Category 12 schools the highest. Additional recurrent funding is available for eligible students with disabilities in non-government schools, based on the difference between Category 12 and the school's funding category. Table 16.2 sets out grant levels for government and non-government schools in 1993 and 1999.

Table 16.2 Commonwealth per capita grants to government and non-government schools, by level of education and Commonwealth funding category, Australia, selected years (\$ estimated at final 1999 prices)

	Primary		Secondary	
	1993	1999	1993	1999
Government	419	419	618	618
Non-government				
Category 1	554	554	878	878
Category 2	739	739	1,164	1,164
Category 3	924	924	1,350	1,350
Category 4	1,124	1,124	1,770	1,770
Category 5	1,299	1,355	1,891	1,974
Category 6	1,441	1,498	2,102	2,185
Category 7	1,584	1,642	2,312	2,394
Category 8	1,738	1,809	2,543	2,646
Category 9	1,856	2,030	2,720	2,971
Category 10	1,972	2,197	2,881	3,208
Category 11	2,093	2,380	3,056	3,469
Category 12	2,216	2,572	3,238	3,756

Source: Commonwealth DETYA

The Commonwealth allocated \$306 million in capital funding for Australian schools in 1999. This funding was made available through the General Element of the Capital Grants Programme in the form of block grants for government and non-government schools to help improve educational outcomes for Australian students through the provision of better school facilities. Of the \$306 million made available in 1999, \$220 million was provided for projects at government schools and \$86 million for projects in non-government schools. A summary of Commonwealth capital funding is at Table 16.3.

Table 16.3 Summary of Commonwealth capital expenditure, all schools, 1999 (\$m) (a)

New South Wales	103.8
Victoria	75.4
Queensland	55.5
Western Australia	30.2
South Australia	23.8
Tasmania	8.3
Northern Territory	3.5
Australian Capital Territory	5.9
Total	306.4

(a) Does not include capital funding provided under the Special Education Non-government Capital support element.

Source: Commonwealth DETYA

Table 16.4 Commonwealth expenditure on schooling, Annual Appropriations, 1998–99 (\$000 actual expenditure)

<i>Grants and Awards</i>	
Grants in Aid	955
Australian Students Prize	1,000
Curriculum Corporation	152
Language Australia	486
Asia Education Foundation	1,152
<i>Literacy</i>	
Children's Literacy National Projects	583
<i>Quality Outcomes</i>	
Civics and Citizenship Education (a)	6,025
School Drug Education Strategy	40
Quality Outcomes – other	7,198
<i>School to Work</i>	
Enterprise Education in Schools	1,021
Vocational Education in Schools	7,202
<i>Indigenous Education</i>	
<i>Aboriginal Education Direct Assistance (a)</i>	
– ATAS	33,802
– VEGAS	8,223
– ASSPA	18,164
Framework for Open Learning (a)	2,887
Total	88,890

(a) Cross-sectoral programs – not all funding is provided in respect of school education.

Source: Commonwealth DETYA

Table 16.5 Commonwealth student assistance for school-age students, 1998–99 (\$000 actual expenditure)

ABSTUDY	56,692
Assistance for Isolated Children	30,083
Total	86,775

Source: Commonwealth DETYA

There was \$185 million provided for Indigenous education under the IESIP and the IEDA. IESIP expenditure is included in Table 16.1. IEDA expenditure is listed under Table 16.4, together with other targeted program expenditure via Annual Appropriations.

A further \$87 million was provided as income support for school students under the AIC scheme and ABSTUDY as set out in Table 16.5.

Capital Grants – summary of accountability reports from the States

Government sector

The most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided in primary and secondary schools were the upgrading and/or provision of general purpose classrooms, library and technology facilities, halls, gymnasiums, staff administration and amenities areas.

Funds were also provided for new schools in growth areas, transportable accommodation and facilities which supported practical learning such as home economics, music and business studies in secondary schools.

Catholic sector

Of the projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially in the Catholic sector, the most common types of work were the construction and refurbishment of general purpose learning areas, libraries in primary schools, science facilities in secondary schools and the upgrading of small rural schools, particularly in the provision of staff and student facilities.

Other projects included the provision of classrooms and specialist facilities in population growth areas; the upgrading of administration and staff areas; and the refurbishment of facilities to meet changing curriculum requirements such as in the areas of vocational education training and information technology.

Independent sector

Of projects completed in 1999 in the independent sector, the most common type of work undertaken and facilities provided were for the construction of classrooms in both primary and secondary schools and the establishment and refurbishment of library, science and other technical facilities.

Other projects included the provision of home economics, music, drama and industrial art facilities, improved administration and staff facilities and multi-purpose rooms for primary students.

Table 16.6 Number of Commonwealth funded non-government schools and students (FTE), by funding category (a) and affiliation, selected years

	<i>Schools</i>			<i>Students (b)</i>		
	<i>1995</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1999</i>
Category 1	61	62	62	54,623	53,866	55,040
Category 2	37	37	36	30,843	32,990	32,422
Category 3	101	94	83	56,672	55,361	52,999
Category 4	22	16	13	5,699	4,836	4,597
Category 5	43	27	27	8,912	8,331	7,303
Category 6	102	79	70	26,295	25,072	23,316
Category 7	34	62	50	9,273	12,615	11,987
Category 8	160	177	173	38,161	39,941	40,849
Category 9	104	119	127	46,898	46,256	51,445
Category 10	1,574	1,624	261	539,516	574,608	115,008
Category 11	178	206	1,623	71,238	74,812	570,159
Category 12	38	64	84	8,689	10,974	14,774
Total	2,454	2,567	2,609	896,817	939,663	979,898
<i>Systemic schools</i>						
Catholic	1,538	1,564	1,566	515,878	542,471	555,951
Independent	148	164	173	31,686	41,292	53,727
Sub Total	1,686	1,728	1,739	547,564	583,763	609,677
<i>Non-systemic schools</i>						
Catholic	146	132	130	94,616	83,722	83,344
Independent	622	707	740	254,637	272,178	286,878
Sub Total	768	839	870	349,253	355,900	370,221
Total						

(a) Schools re-categorised into a lower funding category but which have their per student grants maintained in money terms each year until their revised funding category rate of grant reached the previous level of grant are shown against the funding category to which the school is moving

(b) Where figures have been rounded discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals

Note:

- Catholic systemic schools in NSW, Vic, Qld, SA, Tas and NT were recategorised from Funding Category 10 to Category 11 with effect from the beginning of 1998.
- Data correct as at 31 December 1999.

Source: Commonwealth DETYA

Initiatives and developments

There were a number of significant developments at the national level during 1999, prime among them being the announcement of the new National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century. The Commonwealth government also announced some major new initiatives in relation to its own funding and other activities.

National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century

As described in the National Overview, in April 1999 Education Ministers agreed on a new set of National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century. The new national goals, which replaced the 1989 Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia, were developed through a consultative process involving the various parties which make up school communities

throughout Australia and others with an interest in related aspects of young people's development and well-being. As part of this process the Commonwealth undertook a series of consultations with national interest groups.

At the same time that they issued new goals, Ministers directed that work should proceed on the development of key performance measures to form the basis for nationally comparable reporting on the outcomes of schooling in six key areas covered by the goals: literacy, numeracy, student participation in schooling, vocational and educational training in schools, science, and information technology. The Commonwealth, through DETYA, is participating actively in the work of the National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce on the development of performance measures for national reporting purposes.

New general recurrent grants funding arrangements for non-government schools for 2001–2004

The review of the Education Resources Index (ERI) was completed in December 1998 and its outcomes formed the basis of the Commonwealth government's decision to reform non-government school funding arrangements for the 2001–2004 quadrennium. In May 1999, the government announced that the ERI, which measures a school's resource levels, would be replaced with a fairer and more transparent funding approach based on a measure of the socioeconomic status of a school community. In line with the Commonwealth's support for quality in schooling and for the right of parents to choose the educational environment which best suits the needs of their child, the new arrangements mean that all families will have greater access to the schools of their choice.

Indigenous education

In 1999, the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs determined that current Indigenous Education Agreements would be extended by one year to include 2000, thereby aligning the funding cycle for the IESIP with the Commonwealth General Recurrent Grants Programme. Performance targets for 2000 were negotiated with recipient organisations.

During 1999, 83 non-capital projects funded under the Strategic Results Projects (SRP) funding element of IESIP over 1998 and 1999 were finalised. The major objective of many of the SRP projects was to demonstrate, in specific sites around Australia, that targeted groups of Indigenous students can meet or exceed non-Indigenous educational

standards within a short period of time. The non-capital projects were focused on academic achievement in literacy and numeracy, and increasing access to vocational education in schools. The National Coordination and Evaluation Project (NCEP) had been established to coordinate the projects, monitor their progress and identify key success factors. A report on the success of individual projects and an overall evaluation of the SRP process was prepared under the NCEP during 1999 and will be available in 2000.

The Commonwealth funded the Australian College of Education Indigenous Education Forum which was held in Alice Springs on 3 November 1999. The forum, titled 'Indigenous Education: National Imperatives, Partnerships and Action', brought together educators, key agency representatives and Indigenous community representatives from around the country and across education sectors. The forum discussed strategies for improving the literacy and numeracy skills and attendance at school of Indigenous students and the barriers to improving their educational outcomes. An outcome of the forum was the development of a framework for action plans that can be applied by participants in their own agencies.

In the last quarter of 1999 a review of the IEDA Programme commenced. Details are provided in the 'Research and Evaluation Activity' section of this chapter.

Information technology

The Commonwealth has continued to support initiatives aimed at improving quality and equity in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Australian schools through the Framework for Open Learning Programme (FOLP).

In the 1998–99 financial year, the Commonwealth government provided \$2.9 million under FOLP to support increased awareness and use of the Internet and the Education Network Australia (EdNA) website (<http://www.edna.edu.au>) by members of the education community. This included support for national collaboration and cooperation through the EdNA mechanism, and a focus on promoting awareness and facilitating the use of ICT throughout all sectors of the broader education and training community. In addition, since July 1999 the hosting, maintenance and development of the EdNA website has been fully funded from FOLP.

Other important outcomes included completion of a project to review the outcomes of FOLP and finalisation of an educational community access pilot project in rural areas

and areas of socioeconomic disadvantage to ensure that all members of the community have access to, and understanding of, the uses of technology. In addition, ongoing work took place on a project to provide surplus Commonwealth Government computers and information technology equipment in schools.

Literacy and numeracy

In 1999, States and Territories and non-government education authorities were required to provide a sector-wide strategic plan outlining how Commonwealth literacy and numeracy funding for schools would be used to support the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. The strategic plans focused on schools with a high proportion of students who were educationally disadvantaged in terms of their literacy and numeracy outcomes and provided valuable detail about the way education authorities use Commonwealth funding. The plans generally demonstrated a strong commitment to the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

National Literacy Week was held for the first time in 1999. It was held on 6–10 September to coincide with International Literacy Day on 8 September. The special week highlighted the work the Commonwealth and States and Territories have done to improve children's literacy and numeracy skills. Effective literacy practices were promoted by the National Literacy Week Awards for Literacy and Numeracy Achievement, which provided substantial cash prizes for schools demonstrating excellence in teaching literacy and numeracy. A total of 70 awards valued at \$160,000 went to schools that had added significantly to students' literacy and numeracy performance.

Commonwealth grants totalling \$7 million were provided over three years 1997–99 to assist State and Territory education authorities to conduct projects that would foster improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for students in the early years through the provision of teacher professional development initiatives. The projects trialled a wide range of assessment, identification and intervention strategies in order that all students meet the national literacy goal. The majority of the projects were completed by December 1999.

Funds provided by the Commonwealth under the Literacy and Numeracy Programme – Grants to Schools to Foster Literacy and Numeracy are targeted at students who are educationally disadvantaged and are distributed on the basis of relative need. In 1999, the Commonwealth implemented revised allocation mechanisms using 1996 Census data. The

resultant shifts in allocations between sectors and authorities reflected the Commonwealth's desire to target funds more effectively.

Full Service Schools Programme

The Commonwealth Government's Full Service Schools (FSS) Programme commenced in 1999. The FSS Programme is an initiative which addresses the Commonwealth government's priority of reducing youth unemployment by encouraging young people under 18, primarily 15–17-year-olds, to remain at school to complete year 12.

Under the program, \$22.6 million is available over the two years 1999 and 2000. In 1999, approximately 750 schools in the government, Catholic and independent sectors participated in the planning, implementation and management of 64 FSS projects nationally.

The FSS Programme provides additional funding to clusters of schools within a region or area to develop innovative, regionally focused, on- and off-campus educational programs to address the specific needs of young people who are returning to school or remaining at school, but who are 'at risk' of not completing year 12 or making a successful transition from school to work.

Feedback from State and Territory FSS coordinators and education departments indicates that FSS Programme activities are having a positive impact on the students, who are reporting their satisfaction with a more flexible curriculum and greater support resulting in improved motivation, self-esteem and engagement with learning.

VET in Schools

A substantial funding package of initiatives (over \$240 million for 1996–97 to 2000–01) has been put in place by the Commonwealth government to expand the provision of VET in schools, particularly school-based New Apprenticeships, and to develop effective and reliable pathways from schooling to employment for young people. Initiatives aimed at improving the links between school and further education, training or employment include: Australian National Training Authority funds for VET in schools, the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, the Jobs Pathway Programme and the School to Work Programme.

Highlights in 1999 include the increase in the number of students in ASTF-supported projects from 52,906 in 1998 to approximately 55,000 in 1999. Jobs Pathway Programme providers were contracted to provide coverage

to over 1,620 secondary schools across Australia, and are working in partnership with schools, industry groups, employers and community organisations to assist some 70,000 young people during 1999–2000.

In 1998–99 the School to Work Programme provided funding of \$8.8 million for vocational and enterprise education in schools. As well as providing support to education authorities to enable industry and VET sector personnel to participate in the delivery of VET in schools, funds were provided for strategic projects, including the establishment of part-time New Apprenticeships for years 11 and 12 students. Funding for Enterprise Education in schools included the Enterprising Communities Awards, which recognised the exceptional achievements of 24 schools and communities in working together to contribute to the development of an enterprising culture among students and their communities.

Quality Teacher Programme

In the 1999–2000 Budget, the government announced the provision of \$77.7 million over three years to strengthen the skills of teachers and help lift the status of the teaching profession in government and non-government schools. Funding is being provided under the new Quality Teacher Programme for professional development activities to support the renewal of teacher skills and understanding in literacy, numeracy, mathematics, science, information technology and vocational education in schools. Program planning commenced and consultations with stakeholders were conducted in 1999.

Research and evaluation activity

During 1999, the Commonwealth supported a range of national and international research activities, and undertook a number of program evaluations.

Sample study

Work continued on a Commonwealth-funded sample study on the information technology skills of Australian school students, for which data had been collected during 1998. Preliminary results from the study were published in the 1997 *National Report on Schooling in Australia*. The full report from the project, written by Denise Meredyth, Neil

Russell, Leda Blackwood, Julian Thomas and Patricia Wise of the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, is expected to be released early in 2000 by the Commonwealth Minister. The report, *Real Time – Computers, Change and Schooling*, will be widely distributed to the school education community and will be available on the DETYA website as well as from Australian Government bookshops.

Program evaluations

A major evaluation of the Capital Grants Programme, which commenced in 1998, was completed in 1999. The evaluation examined the efficiency and effectiveness of program arrangements for both government and non-government schools. The Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs is currently considering options for improving program arrangements for the next quadrennium. The evaluation report will be publicly available early in 2000.

An evaluation of the VET in Schools Element of the School to Work Programme commenced in 1999. Funding for enterprise education ceased in June 1999 and an evaluation of the Enterprise Education in Schools Element was completed in 1999. The evaluation found that there is considerable support for enterprise education in schools but that approaches to implementing enterprise education and the level of support for the concept vary across the country.

A review of the IEDA Programme commenced in the last quarter of 1999. A position paper – ‘Partnerships for Change’ – outlining suggested changes to the program was distributed to some 5,500 interested parties and submissions to the review were invited. A number of focus group meetings were also held in all States and Territories.

A major objective of the review is to determine whether the current program elements are meeting their objectives. This will include determining what could be changed within the current program elements to achieve objectives better, and whether a new program could achieve improved outcomes. The review will also report on potential improvements to delivery arrangements and the establishment of performance reporting arrangements.

A report on the review will be provided to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs in early 2000 for his consideration. Any changes to the program will be introduced over the 2001–2004 quadrennium from January 2001.

Other national research

Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) is a joint project between DETYA and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). It involves the collection of data from cohorts of young Australians, with samples selected from year 9 classes in government and non-government schools across Australia. The objective of the survey is to monitor participation in schooling and post-school education and training, and to track the transition pathways of young people from education to work.

LSAY is designed both to track the pathways of specific cohorts, and to monitor change between cohorts over time. Samples of young people are selected at three-yearly intervals, the first having been selected in 1995 (Y95) and the second (Y98) in late 1998. A third cohort (Y01) may be selected in late 2001, depending on the results of a review of the project to be conducted from February to August 2000.

LSAY Research Report 11, issued by ACER in August 1999, provides information on the extent of early school leaving in Australia, based on the interviews carried out with members of the Y95 cohort in 1995, 1996 and 1997.

The report is titled *Early School Leavers in Australia: Findings from the 1995 Year 9 LSAY Cohort*. The first part of the report examines the social and demographic characteristics of early school leavers. The second part reports on their reasons for leaving school early. The third part of the study examines leaving school in relation to social background, demography, school and attitude factors. Particular attention is paid to the influence of individual schools on early school leaving. The final part of the study examines the post-school activities of early school leavers, focusing on their labour-force participation.

The main findings of this report were as follows.

- Students with low levels of school achievement (measured by performance in reading comprehension and numeracy) are substantially more likely to leave school early.
- Boys are more likely to leave school early than girls and this tendency is not fully explained by differences in academic achievement, attitudes to school or aspirations.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are much more likely to leave school early.

- In general, students of non-English-speaking backgrounds are less likely to leave school early.
- Students living in regional and rural areas are more likely to leave school early.
- There are substantial State and Territory differences in early school leaving.
- All other things being equal, for about 5 per cent of students, it appears that the school they attended influenced their decision to leave.
- Positive attitudes to school and higher aspirations about school completion decrease the likelihood of early school leaving.
- Over 50 per cent of students left school early to find a job or an apprenticeship, while a further 13 per cent left because they did not like school.

The Commonwealth is funding three projects to investigate the status and quality of teaching and learning of science, technology and history in primary and secondary schools in Australia. The projects will identify the current status and quality of education in these three subject areas, investigate examples of good practice and provide recommendations for improving the status and quality of teaching and learning of these subjects in Australian schools. Final reports are expected by 30 June 2000.

International research

On the international front, 1999 was a busy year for the PISA project, which will assess the reading, mathematical and scientific literacy skills of 15-year-old students in approximately 30 countries starting in 2000, with further surveys to take place every three years after that.

Australia is participating in PISA along with around 30 other countries, mainly OECD members. Over 200 Australian schools will take part in testing between July and August 2000. The results should be publicly available in late 2001.

Internationally, key achievements during the year included:

- publication of a booklet *Measuring Student Knowledge and Skills: A New Framework for Assessment*, which explains the background to the project and the approaches being taken to defining the three subject domains
- successful conduct of field trials in all countries to trial the assessment instruments and questionnaires

- finalisation of the instruments to be used in the main survey
- initial discussion of the terms of reference for the next cycle of PISA (PISA 2003).

Within Australia, the National Project Manager (ACER) conducted the Australian field trial and contributed significantly to the finalisation of the main instruments and questionnaires. The National Advisory Committee for the project in Australia met once in 1999 to discuss a range of issues and provide advice to both the National Project Manager and the Australian delegate to the overarching international management group (the Board of Participating Countries). In addition, DETYA began a series of consultations with Indigenous representatives to discuss appropriateness of the instruments for Indigenous students and to seek assistance in publicising the project among the Indigenous population.

During 1999, research has continued through the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). TIMSS provides comparative data on achievement in mathematics and science between Australian and overseas students, and between Australian students on a State and Territory basis. ACER, the Australian member of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), is undertaking the following three TIMSS projects:

- *Partial Repeat of Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS-R)*. Australia participated

in TIMSS during 1994 and 1995, testing three populations of students: 9-year-olds (Population 1), 13-year-olds (Population 2) and year 12 students (Population 3). The IEA decided to conduct a repeat of the TIMSS Population 2 testing during 1998, with 38 countries participating. In Australia, 4,055 students were tested in 170 schools, and 644 teacher questionnaires were returned. Both the international and the national reports on TIMSS-R are expected to be released early in 2001.

- *Third International Mathematics and Science Study Repeat – Video Study (TIMSS-R Video Study)*. 1999 has been an intensive year of data collection for the TIMSS-R Video Study. In Australia, 1,748 mathematics students and 1,784 science students in years 8 and 9 from 83 schools were video-recorded in order to examine and compare the interaction of students and teachers, and the relationship between classroom practice and student achievement. Similar recordings were made in seven other countries.
- *Third International Mathematics and Science Study – Follow-up Study on Performance of Australian Students*. This study uses multilevel and multivariate analyses of the original data to identify those system, school, classroom and personal background variables that jointly explain Australian students' achievement levels in TIMSS. The analyses relate to TIMSS Populations 1 and 2 only. The final report is expected in the first half of 2000.