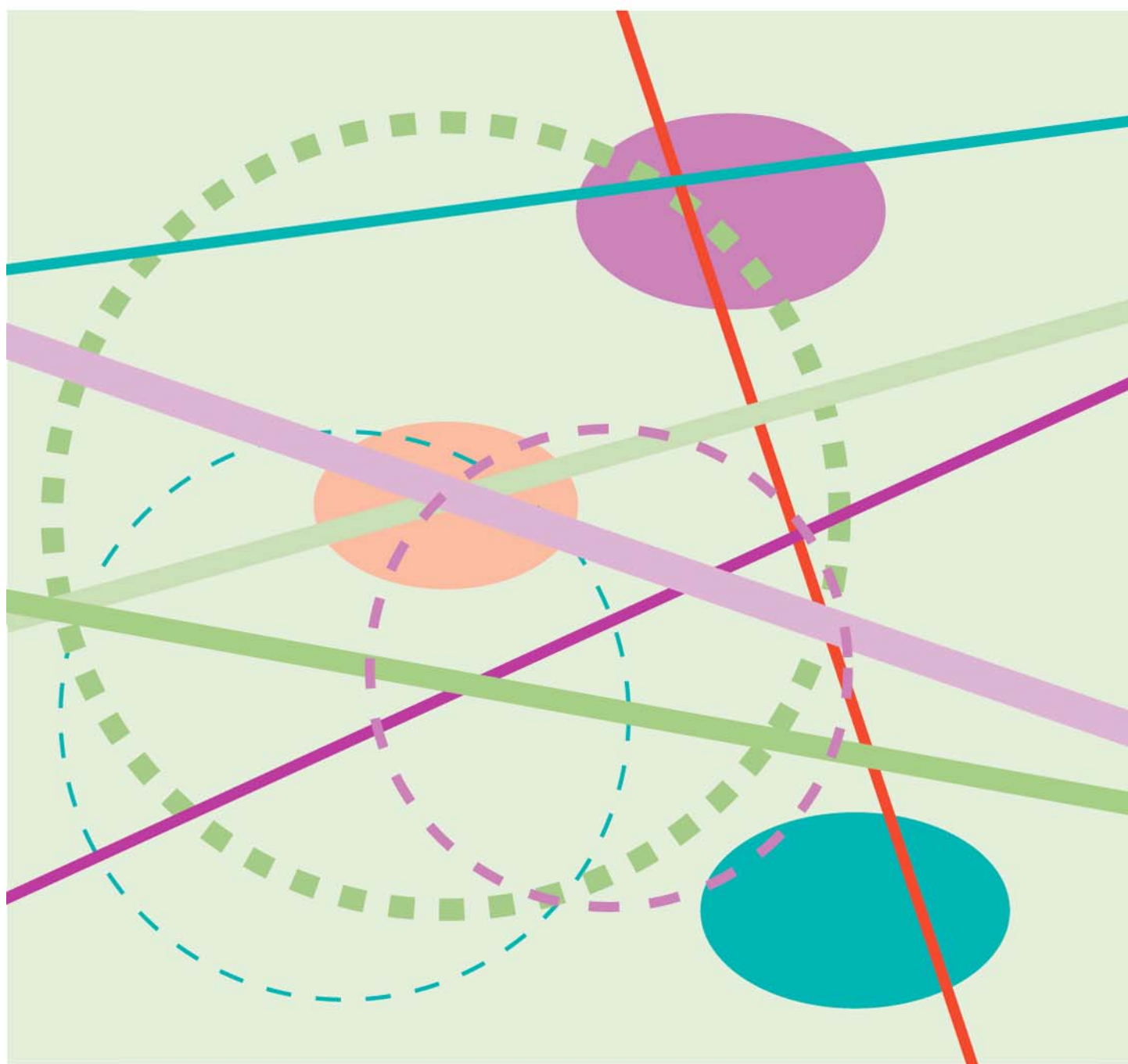



Discussion Paper

A vision for distance learning for the 21st century





This discussion paper is based on the Review findings available at the time of writing. Some of the observations and comments may change as a result of further consultations and/or material that would warrant reconsideration of the views expressed in this discussion paper.

Discussion Paper

A vision for distance learning for the 21st century

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Introduction

The NSW Department of Education and Training provides distance education programs for students who are resident in NSW, who are isolated or whose special circumstances prevent them from attending school on a regular basis. It also provides eligible students with access to curriculum to meet the mandatory requirements and Board of Studies minimum requirements for the award of a School Certificate or Higher School Certificate.

Distance education was traditionally established for students from geographically isolated areas. It now caters for a much broader group of students. NSW Distance Education is provided from pre-school to Year 12 for students aged up to 18 years when enrolling.

The Department also provides support for remote schools through the Access Program. The Access Program links 22 rural and remote schools in five geographical clusters across rural NSW to provide a shared curriculum for Year 11 and 12 students. This effectively allows individual schools to offer a broader and more responsive curriculum and enables rural students to complete their secondary education at their local school without having to live away from home.

Distance education in NSW underwent a major restructure in the early 1990s with the closure of the Correspondence School and the establishment of decentralised distance education schools and centres and the subsequent Access Program.

The Department is adapting to the demands and the potential of a more connected contemporary society. The Review will assist to establish structures and methodologies to meet the needs of distance learners in a connected learning environment.

A program of observations, interviews, surveys and consultations was undertaken by the Review Team to ensure that comprehensive and triangulated data informed the review. Specific elements of the methodology included a literature search, interviews with senior officers from the department, electronic surveys of distance education principals, students, parents and teachers, field visits and observations, focus groups and a visioning workshop.

Two documents provide information on the Review, the Review Report and the Discussion Paper.

The Review Report addresses the review terms of reference, outlining the nature of the current distance education provision in NSW including that of the Access Program. This includes the student profile, teaching and learning processes, structure and breadth of curriculum provision, resource provision including staffing, learning materials, professional learning and the use of technology and related support. It also identifies key policy, practice and implementation issues in the current provision and explores successful models of distance education provision for rural, isolated and distance learners in NSW, Australia and overseas.

The Discussion Paper provides key findings, the draft review opinion and describes a vision for the future. The Discussion Paper provides the basis for further consideration and consultation by parents, students, teachers, other stakeholders and the Department.

The current situation

Focus question 1

Who are the students supported by distance education?

Key review findings

Distance education serves two principal groups of students:

1.1 Equity

Those enrolled as an equity provision of the NSW Department of Education and Training. Students are eligible for this provision because they are unable to attend a school on a daily basis because of their circumstances including geographical isolation, illness, and travel.

At the end of first Term 2008:

- 63 were enrolled in the distance education preschool
- 656 were in primary classes (including 51 in Papua New Guinea and ACT)
- 1180 were in secondary classes (full-time or pathways)
- 332 students were in the Access Program where small schools work together to provide the majority of Stage 6 courses.

1.2 Curriculum

Those enrolled in order to access curriculum supplementation or continuity.

At the end of first Term 2008:

- 238 were in schools for specific purposes, tutorial centres or education and training units
- 4681 were enrolled in single courses (3066 from government schools, 1615 from non-government schools).

Students were enrolled in 80 courses, many of which had very small cohorts - as few as two, with a majority under 15, shared across a number of distance education schools. Courses in 11 Languages Other Than English make up a significant proportion of the courses accessed

1.3 Trends

A trend of decreasing enrolments was seen in the geographically isolated category at both primary and secondary levels.

Enrolments are also declining for the Stage 6 students in Access Program schools, both within the Access Program and in the Stage 4 and 5 classes that potentially feed the Access Program.

Increasing enrolment demand is apparent in the following categories:

- students with significant support needs, associated with mental health conditions or patterns of severe disruptive behaviour
- students with disabilities
- vocationally talented students, where there has been a 350% increase since 2006

- students in specialist settings such as behaviour schools, tutorial centres, schools for specific purposes and other support classes. Students are enrolled at their specialist school and are gaining curriculum access from the distance education school.

The literature review identified that the above trends are replicated at a national level.

Internationally distance learning is also provided as choice; not only as an equity or curriculum guarantee provision. In doing so there are differentiated programs such as full time enrolment, single course enrolment, extension programs (whole and part course) and remediation programs (whole and part course in which students catch up parts of work that have been missed or where students did not meet the benchmark).

Draft review opinion

During the course of the Review the team was impressed with the way in which teachers and schools were providing for the diverse needs of students in a wide range of learning contexts.

The Review Team identified a number of issues in the course of the review:

- distance education provides schooling for students who are in particular circumstances who cannot attend school on a regular basis. The circumstance in which this equity access is provided is not always clearly defined
- a large number of single courses with small cohorts (of which Languages other than English is a significant proportion) raises questions about the number of languages taught, the mode of delivery within an increasingly connected learning environment and the capacity of distance education to continue to provide this curriculum guarantee for both the government and non-government sector
- the increase in enrolments of students with severe disruptive behaviours and mental health conditions raises concerns regarding effective home supervision, effective case management, professional learning and support services
- the distance education provision of curriculum access for students in special placement settings raises concerns for curriculum delivery and resource allocation
- the declining enrolments in the Access Program raise issues for class sizes and curriculum provision
- distance learning around the world exhibits a variety of 'levels of service'. This suggests that it would be possible in NSW to design and deliver a range of services, having different cost bases and requiring greater or lesser inputs at the client end to meet the needs of different clients.

The Review Team identified as a matter for immediate action:

- Equity Programs and Distance Education Directorate should participate in discussions on strategic directions for languages provision in NSW and assist in positioning the role of distance education delivery of language courses
- Redefine access for vocationally talented students and students and outside NSW.

Focus question 2

How do the students learn?

Key Review Findings

2.1 Pedagogy

The review looked at the teaching and learning for students who were isolated by location or circumstance, travelling within Australia and overseas, studying single courses, in the Access Program and students with special needs.

Students overall indicated a high level of satisfaction with the teaching and learning process, although the data revealed that a restricted range of learning processes is employed and the opportunities for peer interaction and collaborative learning are limited.

Print based pedagogies are predominantly used by distance education teachers although some are moving towards incorporating new technologies into their teaching strategies. When using the new technologies some teachers are providing additional rather than alternative activities. This can lead to increased workload for students, teachers and supervisors.

The cycle of mailed material varied from school to school. Distance education students most commonly received a package of printed work. Titles pages outline intended learning outcomes, set out activities and have the provision for feedback on work previously completed. Mailed work can be problematic for travelling students and expensive to mail although there is an appreciation that email connections can be unreliable for students travelling around Australia or overseas.

The time taken to receive work and feedback varied greatly. The longer the time taken, the less valuable the feedback. Some teachers spent a great deal of time providing detailed written feedback that was of little value to the student. The immediacy of the feedback, where it occurred, was a positive factor in the quality of learning and the building of communication for learning. Strong student/teacher/parent relationships are central to this process.

Concerns were raised, mostly by parents of students in integrated distance education schools, regarding the quality of the student/teacher/parent relationship to support and drive learning. Integrated secondary distance education schools are where schools provide both face to face education and distance education.

Access Program teaching features a mixture of synchronous (students learning together) and asynchronous (students working on their own) learning experiences or blended learning using a range of technologies. According to students the program could be enhanced with less printed material, more videoconferencing for student discussions and better coordination by teachers involved in the program. There are small cohorts of students.

Geographically isolated primary students experience a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. Most receive two satellite lessons a week as well as mailed packages.

Opportunities for group learning activities, assemblies and relationship building increased with the use of technology.

Field visits are conducted by some schools. The frequency varies from school to school and often teacher to teacher within a school. There is general agreement that the visits are appreciated by students and parents. It was acknowledged that the frequency of field visits would decrease as new and emerging technologies are used to facilitate relationship building and teaching. There was no evidence to indicate that field visits were essential for the students to achieve success.

International trends in distance learning indicate that pedagogy and instructional design are the key considerations; what differs is the range of ways in which these can be put into practice. There is a dynamic shift in the understanding of the potential of a blend of synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning as new technologies are introduced. Distance education must not be a technical question but a question of pedagogy.

2.2 Student Outcomes

Student and parents expressed a generally high level of satisfaction with the quality of learning provided by distance education and the Access Program. There was a higher satisfaction level for students in autonomous and Access Program schools than ones that were integrated.

Parents expressed pride in the outcomes achieved by students and believed that they were more independent learners with superior technology skills.

Parents expressed a need to increase their syllabus understanding and a reporting process that enabled them to understand student progress compared to other students.

Access Program schools were considered to provide a valued service to the students of small rural towns. The program increased the likelihood of students completing the Higher School Certificate and enabled the students to complete their schooling without leaving the town. Features of the program are increased curriculum choice, a wider cohort, opportunity for socialising with peers and access to the best teachers across the cluster.

Higher School Certificate (2007) achievement levels for students were better in autonomous schools using both value added data and analysis of upper achievement levels (Band 5 and Band 6).

The performance of students in Access Program schools was similar to that of students in integrated schools.

Basic Skills Tests (2007) data indicates that the overall achievement of distance education students is high when compared to state performance. Student performance in

autonomous schools exceeds that of the state and that of integrated schools. Value added data for matched students indicates that autonomous schools are slightly below that for the state in literacy and above that for the state in numeracy. Integrated school performance is slightly below the state in both literacy and numeracy.

2.3 Learning Materials

There is currently an over reliance on traditional print based prepared material. A belief still persists with a significant number of teachers that another entity should be responsible for the development of teaching and learning programs. The use of outmoded learning materials was noted by parents and acknowledged by teachers who felt they needed support to update materials.

While teachers acknowledge the high quality of learning materials developed by the Centre for Learning Innovation they were concerned with the time taken by the Centre for Learning Innovation to develop materials. The rigorous publishing standards to be met by the Centre for Learning Innovation limit their ability to meet distance education course demands. Teachers were also concerned with the additional time taken to adapt material to meet the unique learning contexts of distance education students.

Therefore there is a strong move to develop school based learning programs. Teachers and school leaders recognise the need to develop courses, programs and digitised lesson material that incorporate new technologies, individualise the learning for the student and move towards a more synchronous delivery.

There was widespread support for the development of digital learning platform scaffolds/core units that could be easily adapted to meet the needs of a range of students including those with learning difficulties and gifted and talented students. These would need to be available in print and electronic form and be easily modified for individual programs.

Schools identified a need for a process that supports schools to develop core units and a structure that co-ordinates the sharing of learning materials that are developed by teachers. The Teaching and Learning Exchange (TaLE) is not perceived to meet this need.

The Review Team was impressed with the confidence expressed by students and parents with the quality of education provided through distance education.

The focus for distance learning is shifting from an outmoded, traditional, 'old technology' pedagogical model that is one to one, paper based and teacher directed. It involves a cultural change from reliance on learning materials to the development of personalised teaching and learning programs that incorporate quality teaching. Teachers are aware that good teaching involves rich conversations and connected relationships. Where possible, live, real-time sharing of ideas facilitated by interactive technologies can encourage discussion, critical thinking and the formation of new knowledge. Collaborative, facilitated learning is enabled.

The personal and social needs of learners can be more easily monitored and accommodated. When asynchronous discussion environments or activities are added, students are afforded time for thoughtful analysis, reflection and composition. A contemporary distance learning pedagogy that draws on a broad range of learning processes and pedagogical styles can reinvigorate the human, interactive roles of teachers and learners into distance learning.

The team also noted that the distance education practice and options we are currently practising, trialling or considering in New South Wales are similar to innovative and promising practices happening in other Australian states or overseas.

The Review Team identified a number of concerns during the course of the review:

- traditional distance education pedagogies predominate, limiting the learning opportunities for students that a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities would offer
- the quality of feedback to students varies due to a lack of immediacy. This could be improved with the increased use of new and emerging technologies
- the widespread use of outdated learning materials indicates that current practices do not adequately assist teachers to develop learning materials for students in a blended learning environment
- some schools and teachers are developing teaching and learning materials but there is little sharing between schools resulting in unnecessary duplication which highlights the need for a process to co-ordinate the development and distribution of materials
- student achievement in autonomous school sites exceeds that for students in integrated sites, warranting further exploration
- Access program could benefit from links with a wider range of schools
- parents were not confident of their understanding of Board of Studies requirements, syllabus requirements and student performance relative to their peers in other settings as student reporting procedures are not standardised.

The Review Team identified as matters for immediate action:

- schools should review their procedures in relation to developing parents' understanding of Board of Studies requirements, syllabus requirements and student performance relative to their peers in other settings
- schools should ensure that student reporting procedures are in line with Department of Education and Training guidelines for student reporting.

Focus question 3

How is the learning and teaching for students facilitated?

Key Review Findings

3.1 Teachers

There is a mix of experienced and inexperienced teachers in distance education schools. The level of teaching experience in Access Program schools varied from school to school.

School leaders reported an increase in staff turnover and the appointment of younger, less experienced teachers.

There are a significant number of temporary teachers in metropolitan distance education schools employed to offset enrolment changes.

3.2 Professional Learning

School leaders and teachers indicated a high level of satisfaction with access to and participation in professional learning. This is in contrast to the observation that there is an adherence to traditional distance education models rather than blended learning models.

There is an increased need for ongoing professional learning to support teachers to meet the learning needs of students with special needs.

There is an increased need for ongoing professional learning in the use of new technologies to ensure teachers have the competence and confidence to embed them in teaching and learning practice in a manner that builds learning relationships.

As the numbers of students in Access Program schools decreases opportunities for teachers to meet Institute of Teachers requirements are lessened.

3.3 Supervisors

Supervisors are vital for the maximisation of learning outcomes. Supervisors may be in the home or in the home school for single subject courses. In the preschool and primary years the home supervisor acts in a direct way as a mediator of the learning program. The home school supervisor role in secondary schools has a more indirect monitoring and support role, but remains highly significant.

The supervisor role is integral and needs to be supported by schools, teachers and the distance education schools.

3.4 Schools

Primary and secondary school students are enrolled in both integrated and autonomous settings. School leaders and staff from both autonomous and integrated settings expressed the view that school identity, management and resource allocation was more effective in an autonomous setting.

There was strong dissatisfaction with the integrated setting. The main reasons stated were the difficulty for staff of engaging with both face to face and distance education, reduced access to

teachers by distance education students, difficulties associated with the delivery of printed material and the timely receipt of marked work and feedback. The benefits of the integrated setting where teachers teach face to face and distance education students in the same course was noted.

3.5 Technology

A wide range of technologies is used in distance education schools. The level varies from school to school and from teacher to teacher within the different schools. Teachers in autonomous schools tended to have a higher rate of uptake of new technologies than those in integrated schools. Teachers in autonomous schools also indicated that a range of technologies was needed to provide for student learning.

Teachers in the Access Program have access to and use more electronic technologies than most teachers in distance education. Students and teachers have standardised technology available for teaching and learning.

The following concerns were raised:

- lack of compatibility of technology hardware and software hindering the learning process
- inadequate access to computers both in the school, home school and the home environment
- restricted access to the Department network can be limiting for secondary students in isolated settings and students in non government schools who are unable to access the network
- the Department portal was not seen as user friendly and had the effect of reducing student use
- teacher training, technology support and infrastructure need to be enhanced to realise potential of new and emerging technologies.

At an international level there is a rapidly expanding use of technology featuring synchronous and asynchronous delivery. Immediate feedback, collaborative tools for interactions and the use of the internet for content that is evaluated and managed by the student with facilitation by the teacher are features of these connected learning environments.

Draft review opinion

The Review Team noted that schools and homes are seeking to adapt to, accommodate and embrace new and emerging technologies for student learning.

The Review Team identified a number of concerns during the course of the review:

- professional learning for teachers needs to be enhanced to provide both experienced and beginning teachers of distance learning with the teaching skills to meet the needs of different learner groups
- schools, students and parents were positive about the learning and teaching provided

by autonomous schools which was not the case for integrated schools thereby questioning the continuation of this model of delivery

- teachers in remote settings would benefit from opportunities to teach a wider range of students in their subject area and be mentored and coached by experienced teachers and school executive
- professional learning to assist teachers to better program for students with learning needs to be better supported
- a reliable electronic learning environment in the home, home school and distance education school needs to be provided to realise the potential of the new and emerging technologies
- administrative tasks such as enrolment, tracking student work, registering student-teacher communications, attendance and assessment information are time consuming and could be improved with the development of an integrated electronic data base
- lack of staff access to technologies is a concern and consideration needs to be given regarding the provision of appropriate technologies for staff.

The Review Team identified as matters for immediate action:

- review the role of the Coordinator, Digital Learning currently located at the Centre for Learning and Innovation to support key strategic directions in distance learning pedagogy identified in the review
- development of specifications for a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain (CDLD) for distance learning
- examination of options for a learning management and student administration system
- identification suitable standardised technologies and platforms.

Focus question 4

What is provided to support learning and teaching?

Key Review Findings

4.1 Resources

Facilities

Distance education facilities vary significantly between sites. Some sites are purpose built and well resourced and others have limited space restricting the potential of new technologies for learning. There was general agreement that the best facilities are purpose built facilities that can accommodate current and future technologies, classrooms for mini schools and purpose built satellite and video conferencing studios.

Distance Education Support Unit

The unit caters for 35 students with intellectual disabilities, including seven primary students. There has been an increase in secondary enrolments. Students with special needs in other categories do not qualify for support from the unit.

Centre for Learning Innovation and Teaching and Learning Exchange

The Centre for Learning Innovation develops learning material for teachers. Distance education teachers do not perceive the materials to be meeting their diverse and increasing needs. Scaffolding for teachers to adapt the products developed by the Centre for Learning Innovation has not been provided.

4.2 Staffing

In relation to staffing, some areas were identified for possible adjustments to ensure schools are well supported.

These are:

- support staff with expertise in technology to assist teachers to realise the potential of new technologies
- utilising the existing expertise in the Distance Education Support Unit to support students in other settings
- utilising the existing staffing allocation in Access Program schools to enable support to a greater number of students and schools.

4.3 Enrolment Procedures

Enrolment procedures are seen to be time consuming leading to delays in the provision of the teaching and learning programs. The implementation of the Enrolment Registration Number for students will assist schools to address this matter.

Enrolment procedures are currently under development to support all schools in managing partial enrolments.

Students with severe disruptive behaviours are frequently enrolled throughout the year. Due to the time consuming enrolment process the commencement of the learning program can be delayed.

4.4 School Organisation

A range of school structures exists to support distance education students. Some structures are meeting the learning needs better than others.

Multi campus sites expressed concerns with 'split site' structure with regard to distance between campuses, support and communication.

Preschool through distance education is provided for a maximum of 66 students. This is provided through Dubbo Distance School of Distance Education with a small provision at Broken Hill School of the Air. There are currently 63 students and demand for places is stable.

Draft review opinion

The Review Team identified a number of concerns during the course of the review:

- the capacity of the current distance education school structures to meet the needs of different learner groups given their different contexts and circumstances
- learning materials development, co-ordination, sharing and search engine are currently not meeting the diverse and increasing needs of teachers
- the efficacy of multi campus schools across regions, management of multi campus schools that are geographically distant from each other and the capacity of integrated schools to meet the needs of distance education students
- there are varying approaches to executive staffing and school and administrative support staff and this needs to be investigated
- there is a need to strengthen Learning Support Teams and targeted case management in distance education schools and this could be achieved through the relocation of positions currently in the Distance Education Support Unit
- staffing arrangements for distance education and Access Program schools may no longer be appropriate as a result of the changing student profile and increased access to connected learning strategies system wide
- the widely held perception that integrated schools use distance education resources to supplement face to face delivery needs to be resolved
- Access Program enrolments in some schools and the participation of some students in face to face lessons may not meet Board of Studies guidelines.

The Review Team identified as matters for immediate action:

- the need to further investigate the varying approaches to staffing of the different distance education settings
- the review and redesign of recurrent supplementary funding for distance education and Access Program schools
- plan for a review of facilities for identified distance education sites
- clarification of access to funding support for distance education students with confirmed disabilities
- the inclusion by regions of distance education schools when allocating regional support and resources for student welfare and disability programs
- provide briefings for regional personnel on the current distance education guidelines with particular focus on access for students with significant support needs.

Meeting the needs of the 21st century distance learner

This vision for the future for distance learning builds on the good practice identified in the Review. Where communication tools are used flexibly and creatively, distance learners are no longer isolated from their teachers and peers. They participate in class based activities, collaborative learning and use interactive learning resources.

Learners

Learners seeking access to distance learning come from a variety of contexts and circumstances. What they have in common is their physical separation from some or all of the other learners in their class or learning group. Some must access schooling from home because location, illness or other circumstances prevent them attending a school on a daily basis. Many of these students are seeking distance learning full time and for the long term so a major consideration is their need to identify with a school and class group and to form positive social and learning relationships.

Other students are members of families that are temporarily itinerant, travelling with their families within Australia or temporarily overseas. These mobile students need access to full or part courses depending on their stage of learning and the learning processes used will be related to the kind of access the students have to communication technologies.

Other students will be attending a school, but will access distance learning for some of their program, including:

- students enrolled in rural learning communities in which a significant proportion of the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate will be provided through distance learning
- students enrolled in a secondary school requiring single course provision.

The learning needs of these students will be influenced by their stage of learning and the systems of learner support that are put in place in their school to ensure the quality and frequency of interactions with teachers and peers.

Other students with particular learning needs will be students whose behaviour limits their capacity to engage in learning in a classroom.

There is an emerging demand from highly independent students in a range of settings who are seeking maximum flexibility in the time, place and pace of their learning. Some of these students wish to access whole courses, modules for acceleration, remediation or coaching.

Pedagogy

An effective pedagogy for distance learning will have a blend of learning activities to:

- facilitate opportunities for students to interact with others
- place students in a variety of real and virtual groups for learning under the guidance of single teachers or groups of teachers as appropriate
- provide a balance of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities
- support and incorporate a wide range of learning activities, learning styles and capacities

- provide prompt feedback to the student on her or his progress and encourage the student to independently track their learning and accept appropriate levels of responsibility for the outcomes.

Support for the pedagogy

Teachers will be trained in distance learning pedagogy to embrace new and emerging technologies that support collaborative and individual learning and to design, develop and implement programs of learning for their students.

Technologies will underpin a range of distance learning pedagogies enabling flexibilities in size and composition of learning groups, styles of learning, scheduling and place of learning.

Learning programs will be developed by teachers and will contribute to a pool of digital distance learning resources that engage students and incorporate embedded feedback. A collaborative digital learning domain will facilitate sharing and support professional learning communities.

The model

No one mode of distance learning will meet the needs of all students. Distance learners require a range of provision with relevant learning processes, resources and support. Flexible learning options will provide for student choice and match student needs.

A model with six modes of distance learning is proposed. Each mode takes into consideration:

- stage of learning
- learner support
- quality and frequency of interactions with teachers and peers
- student welfare
- the nature of the student's enrolment
- internet access
- place and time of learning.

In each mode, relationships to support learning will be built and nurtured through structured and unstructured interactions between learners, teachers and parents.

The model sets out the available choices and the key considerations for learners when matching their learning needs with distance learning modes.

Distance Learning in the 21st Century Model: Six Modes

Home Distance Learning

Stage of Learning	Preschool to Stage Six
Learner Support	Home supervisor
Interaction with Teacher and Peers	Class, school based, virtual forums
Teacher Learner Communication	Daily
Student Welfare	Class, distance learning school
Nature of Enrolment	Full time, long term, whole program
Internet Access	DET
Place of Learning	Home
Time of Learning	Scheduled class times

Tutorial Distance Learning

Stage of Learning	Stages Three to Five
Learner Support	Regional responsibility to arrange support
Interaction with Teacher and Peers	distance learning teacher, Outreach Group
Teacher Learner Communication	Daily
Student Welfare	Regional responsibility
Nature of Enrolment	Temporary, six months maximum, whole program
Internet Access	Arranged by region
Place of Learning	Home, Outreach Centre
Time of Learning	Negotiated with Regions

Rural Linked Distance Learning

Stage of Learning	Stages Five to Six
Learner Support	Local school teachers
Interaction with Teacher and Peers	Class based activities
Teacher Learner Communication	Daily
Student Welfare	Home school, class
Nature of Enrolment	Long term, whole program
Internet Access	Home school provided
Place of Learning	In a small rural government school
Time of Learning	Scheduled class times

Single Course Distance Learning

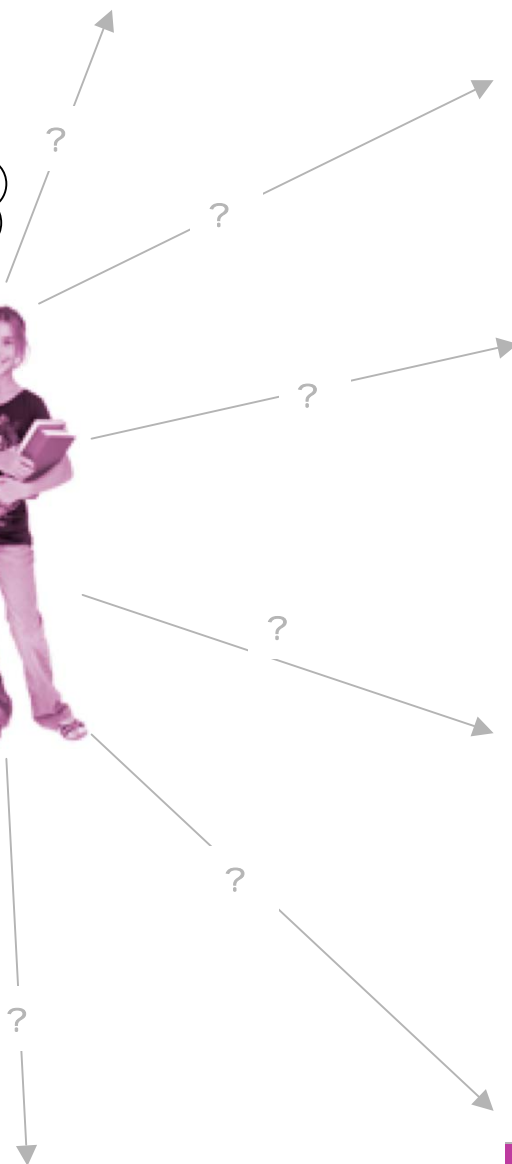
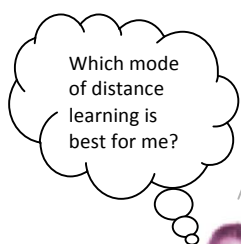
Stage of Learning	Stages Five to Six
Learner Support	Local school teacher(s)
Interaction with Teacher and Peers	Virtual forums
Teacher Learner Communication	At least weekly
Student Welfare	Home school responsibility
Nature of Enrolment	Short term, single course(s)
Internet Access	Home school provided
Place of Learning	In a school, government or non-government
Time of Learning	Negotiated with home school

Mobile Distance Learning

Stage of Learning	Stages One to Four
Learner Support	Parent or carer
Interaction with Teacher and Peers	Family interaction and virtual forums
Teacher Learner Communication	Frequent but dependant on circumstances
Student Welfare	Parent or carer
Nature of Enrolment	Temporary, maximum four terms
Internet Access	Student provided
Place of Learning	Anywhere
Time of Learning	Flexible

On-Line Distance Learning

Stage of Learning	Stages Five to Six
Learner Support	Some to none
Interaction with Teacher and Peers	Virtual forums
Teacher Learner Communication	Frequent but dependant on circumstances
Student Welfare	Parent, carer or home school
Nature of Enrolment	Single or short courses
Internet Access	Student provided
Place of Learning	Home or school
Time of Learning	Flexible



Rationale

There is a need for programs that specifically address the circumstances of P-12 students isolated at home during their school years and seeking full time enrolment. Available technologies allow access to a broad range of interactive learning processes which facilitate class based learning. The personal and social needs of learners are more easily monitored and accommodated.

How will students learn?

Students will learn through:

- regularly scheduled class-based lessons with a balance between working alone and in collaboration with peers
- identification with a class or learning group and maintenance of positive social and learning relationships
- opportunities for social and academic learning through real or virtual meetings with others
- flexible time scheduling for individual tasks that recognise the learner's context and learning needs
- prompt and regular individual and group feedback on achievement and progress.

How will learning and teaching be facilitated by teachers and schools?

Learning and teaching will be facilitated by:

- teachers who are undertaking training in distance learning pedagogy for classes of home based distance learners
- the support of a home supervisor
- a Learning Support Team
- teacher development of learning programs with access to a pool of distance learning resources
- student access to the internet and use of new and emerging technologies to support learning and provide prompt and regular feedback.

How will DET support learning and teaching?

DET will support the learning and teaching by:

- provision of distance learning teachers
- providing standardised hardware and software in the learner's home and at the school to serve as a delivery platform for distance learning
- providing professional learning modules to establish and maintain teacher skills
- development of systems support for student administration and learning management
- development and maintenance of a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain.

Which students will be most likely to use this provision?

Students who must access schooling from home because of location, illness or other circumstance that prevents them attending a school on a daily basis. This includes students who require long term enrolment in distance learning.

These students will be funded as an equity provision.

Rationale

There is a need for rich and engaging digital learning to meet the needs of students in Years Five to Ten whose behaviour limits their capacity to engage in learning in a classroom. Distance learning can meet the short term needs of students temporarily unable to access classroom learning in a Tutorial Centre or similar facility, or for whom such a placement would be inappropriate. Maximum placement of six months.

How will students learn?

Students will learn through:

- engagement with curriculum units in digital form designed to meet their academic needs and interests
- structured individual learning tasks with embedded feedback mechanisms
- flexible time scheduling for individual tasks that recognise the learner's context and learning needs
- collaboration with peers where possible.

How will learning and teaching be facilitated by teachers and schools?

Learning and teaching will be facilitated by:

- teachers who are undertaking training in distance learning pedagogies for students with special needs
- teacher development of units of work to meet the academic needs and interests of the students and support students with learning difficulties
- teacher development of learning programs with access to a pool of distance learning resources
- use of new and emerging technologies to facilitate learning and provide prompt and regular feedback
- a learning support team that meets the needs and circumstances of the learner.

How will DET support learning and teaching?

DET will support the learning and teaching by:

- provision of distance learning teachers
- regional responsibility for placement, review and return to school
- providing professional learning modules to establish and maintain teacher skills
- development of systems support for student administration and learning management
- development and maintenance of a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain.

Which students will be most likely to use this provision?

Students temporarily unable to access classroom learning in a Tutorial Centre or similar facility, or for whom such a placement would be inappropriate. A maximum six month placement.

These students will be funded as an equity provision.

Rationale

There is a need for provision that specifically addresses the learning needs of Years 9-12 students in small isolated rural schools in Riverina, New England and Western NSW Regions. This provision will increase curriculum choice, the pool of teachers, learning cohort and opportunities for socialising with peers. These benefits can be realised through formal linkages between schools to facilitate class based learning using available technologies. A significant proportion of the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate will be provided by these schools in this way.

How will students learn?

Students will learn through:

- regular school-initiated formal links for class-based learning activities with a minimum of two lessons per week per course
- a blend of working alone and in collaboration with peers across the linked learning community
- opportunities for social and academic learning through real or virtual meetings with others
- flexible time scheduling for individual tasks that recognise the learner's context and learning needs
- prompt and regular individual and group feedback on achievement and progress.

How will learning and teaching be facilitated by teachers and schools?

Learning and teaching will be facilitated by:

- teachers who are undertaking training in distance learning pedagogy
- linked learning community teachers, peers and school infrastructure
- formal school linkages to ensure appropriate class size, across regional boundaries where necessary
- teacher development of learning programs with access to a pool of distance learning resources
- use of new and emerging technologies to facilitate learning and provide prompt and regular feedback.

How will DET support learning and teaching?

DET will support the learning and teaching by:

- regional facilitation of Rural Linked Distance Learning Communities
- program specific supplementary staffing for rural linked distance learning determined and allocated at a regional level
- technology provision and support
- provision of professional learning modules to establish and maintain teacher skills
- development of systems support for student administration and learning management
- development and maintenance of a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain.

Which students will be most likely to use this provision?

Students enrolled in rural learning communities in which a significant proportion of the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate will be provided in this way for these learners.

Students at other isolated rural schools requiring curriculum access for one or more School Certificate or Higher School certificate courses.

Students in Home Distance Learning who would prefer to access one or more School Certificate or Higher School certificate courses through a local learning community.

These students will be funded as an equity provision.

Rationale

There is a need for a single course provision to meet the needs of students in Years 9-12 seeking single courses for School Certificate or Higher School Certificate that are not available in their home school. This mode will support students who have not developed autonomous learning skills and require higher levels of teacher support and structure than an on-line learning environment.

How will students learn?

Students will learn through:

- individualised learning from digital, print and physical resources
- some linkages to other class members to perform group tasks
- flexible time scheduling negotiated with the home school
- weekly contact with distance learning teacher
- use of home school physical, human and digital resources.

How will learning and teaching be facilitated by teachers and schools?

Learning and teaching will be facilitated by:

- teachers who are undertaking training in distance learning pedagogy
- distance learning teachers and peers
- development of learning programs with access to a pool of distance learning resources
- use of new and emerging technologies to provide prompt and regular feedback
- home school provision of hardware, software and links to enable interaction with peers and distance learning teacher.

How will DET support learning and teaching?

DET will support the learning and teaching by:

- provision of distance learning teachers
- providing professional learning modules to establish and maintain teacher skills
- development of systems support for student administration and learning management
- development and maintenance of a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain.

Which students will be most likely to use this provision?

Students enrolled in a Department of Education and Training secondary school requiring single course provision for one or more School Certificate or Higher School Certificate courses and for whom On-Line Distance Learning or Rural Linked Distance Learning would not meet their needs or circumstances. These students will be funded as an equity provision.

Students from a non-government secondary school access this mode on a fee paying basis.

Rationale

There is a need for services to students from Kindergarten to Year 8 who are temporarily itinerant because of their parents' work or family travel. Lesson content and learning processes need to be flexible and adaptive to embrace the rich learning experiences, incidental insights and unique context of the learners. Portable technologies allow access and communication between learners and their school and can support flexible learning programs to meet the schedules of mobile families. Maximum one year enrolment for funded students.

How will students learn?

Students will learn through:

- structured individual or family learning units in digital or written form with embedded feedback mechanisms
- flexible scheduling to maximise learning from student's experiences as a mobile learner
- whole family provision for group learning and peer interaction.

How will learning and teaching be facilitated by teachers and schools?

Learning and teaching will be facilitated by:

- teachers who are undertaking training in distance learning pedagogy for mobile learners
- portable digital devices where practicable with printed learning resources as required
- the support of a parent or carer
- teacher development of learning programs with access to a pool of distance learning resources
- use of new and emerging technologies to provide regular feedback on at least a monthly basis.

How will DET support learning and teaching?

DET will support the learning and teaching by:

- provision of distance learning teachers
- standardised hardware and software provision
- providing professional learning modules to establish and maintain teacher skills
- development of systems support for student administration and learning management
- development and maintenance of a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain.

Which students will be most likely to use this provision?

Students whose home base is in New South Wales and who are

- members of families that are temporarily itinerant,
- travelling with their families within Australia for periods of up to one year
- travelling or are temporarily resident overseas for periods of up to one year.

These students will be funded as an equity provision.

Students from outside NSW who request a full or part NSW curriculum provision in the range P – 8, access this mode on a full fee-paying basis.

Students from within NSW who have already completed one year of Mobile Learning, access this mode on a fee paying basis.

On-line distance learning

Stages Five to Six

Rationale

There is a need for a flexible learning mode that supports curriculum choices for students in Years 9 - 12 seeking single courses for the School Certificate or Higher School Certificate. On-line learning can meet the needs of autonomous senior students who seek maximum flexibility in the time, place and pace of their learning. On-line learning can also provide for student needs in acceleration, remediation and coaching.

How will students learn?

Students will learn through:

- engagement with digital on-line learning modules with embedded feedback mechanisms
- structured individual learning tasks using teacher recommended digital resources
- predominantly individual learning tasks with minimal peer interaction, supported by a learning management system
- maximum flexibility of time, place and pace, while meeting Board of Studies requirements.

How will learning and teaching be facilitated by teachers and schools?

Learning and teaching will be facilitated by:

- teachers who are undertaking training in distance learning pedagogy for on-line learning
- teacher development of online courses with embedded feedback
- development and marking of assessment tasks by teachers
- teacher development of learning programs with access to a pool of distance learning resources
- tracking and monitoring of learning progress by a learning management system.

How will DET support learning and teaching?

DET will support the learning and teaching by:

- establishing an On-line Distance Learning School
- provision of distance learning teachers for an on-line distance learning school
- provision of a learning technology platform
- providing professional learning modules to establish and maintain teacher skills
- development of systems support for student administration and learning management
- development and maintenance of a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain.

Which students will be most likely to use this provision?

Students enrolled in a Department of Education and Training secondary school requiring single course provision for one or more School Certificate or Higher School Certificate courses and for whom Single Course Distance Learning or Rural Linked Distance Learning would not meet their needs or circumstances. These students will be funded as an equity provision.

Students from a non-government secondary school will access this mode on a fee paying basis.

Students wishing to access courses or modules for acceleration, remediation or coaching will access this mode on an equity or fee paying basis

Building and supporting the model

The proposed model will involve significant changes to the culture and operations of distance learning. Learners, parents, teachers and leaders will be engaged in consultation and professional dialogue to refine and develop the model.

The changes will require the design of a community of distance learning schools, planning for teacher professional learning, development and sharing of learning resources, provision of technologies, development of learning support structures and student access criteria.

Upon the completion of the consultation phase feedback will be considered and an implementation plan will be developed.

Community of Distance Learning Schools

There is a need for development of a community of distance learning schools with a range of structures and associated infrastructure to support the distance learning model. This would incorporate the different modes of learning as the basis for planning.

The design would include:

- location, structure and function of autonomous distance learning schools and Rural Linked Distance Learning Communities
- internal organisation, staffing and resourcing for the different learning modes
- the relationship of the new structures to regions and state office functions
- technical support and other facilities requirements necessary to support different levels of synchronous and asynchronous learning.

Teacher Professional Learning

Quality teachers with expertise in distance learning pedagogy are central for successful learning. Accredited professional learning modules need to be developed to provide for both new and continuing distance learning teachers. Modules would include course development, unit and program design, immediacy of feedback, peer interaction, relationship building and the uses of current and emerging technologies

Professional learning activities drawing on the expertise of Disability Programs and Student Welfare Directorates will be provided regionally to build the capacity of teachers to meet the specific learning needs of students.

Learning Resources and Technology

Systems to manage student administration and learning require development. This would involve liaison with Student Administration Learning and Management (SALM) to develop an electronic data base for student administrative tasks such as registration, enrolments, tracking student work, registering contact with teachers, attendance and assessment information that meet the needs of distance learning schools.

The provision of technology resources and support for synchronous and asynchronous learning requires collaboration with Information and Technology Directorate (ITD). Consideration needs to be given to the following:

- resourcing to provide every distance learning student and teacher with suitable hardware such as PC or laptop or iPod
- resourcing to provide connectivity to the internet for every distance learning student
- appropriate learning management systems such as Moodle for use by distance teachers
- appropriate web-based collaborative tools, such as Bridgit, to provide opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous learning.

The development of a learning resources facility is necessary to assist teachers to share learning resources. It is proposed that the Department develop a Collaborative Digital Learning Domain specific to the needs of distance learning teachers, complementing TaLE. This dynamic web-based domain will facilitate the development, storage, retrieval and sharing of learning objects and learning resources in a collaborative professional environment. It will support teachers working together to develop, trial and critique units, courses and materials.

Learning Support

The learning of students with special needs will be better supported through the proposed model. Learning support teams and targeted case management in distance learning schools will be strengthened through access to counselling support, funding and professional support in collaboration with regions. This will be supported by the reallocation of positions currently located in the Distance Education Support Unit to other distance learning schools to strengthen learning support teams.

Distance learning resources and professional learning support will be available to teachers in schools for specific purposes, tutorial centres and others, to assist curriculum access.

Student Access Criteria

Student access criteria for each of the modes in the proposed model need to be clearly defined to ensure that the learning provided matches student choice, need and circumstance. The criteria for enrolment in each mode of distance learning will replace the current enrolment categories. In particular access for students currently enrolled as vocationally talented and students outside NSW will be reviewed. The process will identify appropriate funding arrangements, as equity or fee paying enrolments. Criteria for access to equity funding for Rural Linked Distance Learning will also be developed.

Continuing the consultation and review process

In building and supporting the model there will need to be ongoing consultation and review. Schools, parents, teachers and students will be integral to the process and provide valuable advice in shaping the future. The many areas of the Department which support students and distance learning will continue to be consulted. This is the beginning of the process where the focus is clearly on student learning and how a model of distance learning can enhance student access, equity and choice.

Consultation and feedback

School communities, students, parents, teachers, principals and other interested stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on this paper. This discussion paper is based on findings available at the time of writing. Some of the observations comments and proposals may change as a result of further consultations and/or material that would warrant reconsideration of the views expressed in this discussion paper.

The review team is interested in views relating to the model outlined to meet the needs of the 21st Century learner. The model places the learner at the centre and it is from that perspective that we invite your comment.

- What do you see as the opportunities for the learner?
- What might be some limitations for the learner?
- What might be some further enhancements for the learner?

Responses should be to the model as a whole and each mode within the model.

In addition comment is invited on each area identified in “Building and supporting the model” this includes:

- Community of Distance Learning Schools
- Teacher Professional Learning
- Learning Resources and Technology
- Learning Support
- Student Access Criteria

Responses should be to each item and could also include other matters not identified.

The paper also identifies issues for immediate attention while the consultation, planning and implementation process is progressed. Comment on the issues listed in the paper or other issues needed to be identified for immediate action should be included in responses.

Ideas in relation to implementation are also encouraged.

A response proforma is available electronically from:

<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/lists/directoratesaz/equity/rde/distanceedu/index.htm>

A response proforma is available in hard copy from:

Distance Education Review Team
PO Box 717
Bathurst
NSW 2790
Phone 02 6334 8072

Responses can be submitted to either of the addresses above by February 27, 2009.

Equity Programs and Distance Education Directorate
Rural and Distance Education
PO Box 717
Bathurst NSW 2795

Telephone 02 6334 8072

This resource can be downloaded at:
<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/lists/directoratesaz/equity/rde/distanceedu/index.htm>

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