



newsletter

NSW Teachers Federation

May 2011

Questions for the Rural and Distance Education Manager

The March 10 meeting of the Distance Education Restricted Committee developed a series of questions that have been sent to the education department's Rural and Distance Education Manager Mike Toms, for a written response for the term 2 committee meeting.

The questions are:

Sharing learning support material

Reports from distance education settings indicate there are some problems around sharing learning support material developed and uploaded onto *moodle*. Is the Distance Education Directorate aware of these problems and if so, what remedy is being developed?

Centralised printing and mail out

At the previous joint meeting of the Department and Distance Education Restricted Committee in August 2010, the matter of the centralising of printing and mailing out of learning support materials was raised. Could you please advise the current status of this matter?

Learning material repository

The trialling of a learning material repository was recommended in the distance education review document, *A more connected future*. Federation understands this is underway. Could you advise what action has been taken by the Distance Education Directorate to apply quality assurance of locally produced learning support materials?

Copyright and Directorate support

What support is the Distance Education Directorate providing to distance education settings when dealing with the management of copyright issues in the production of learning support materials?

Technology, Digital Education Revolution and Teaching for Learning

Concerns were raised about the localised costs to distance education settings and lack of centralised technology support for either Digital Education Revolution notebooks or Teaching for Learning computers. What is the Directorate's advice to schools in the following situations?

- A number of Distance Education Centres advise that their teachers support students in both public and private settings and Digital Education Revolution notebooks are not compatible with the computers used in private schools.
- When technology support is requested for a computer not at a departmental school, that is at a distance education student's residence, the response from regional/district IT support staff is not helpful, for example, when informed that the computer is not in a school setting, the reported advice is that it is not their responsibility.
- The additional cost to distance education settings managing Digital Education Revolution notebooks and Teaching for Learning computers, specifically the retrieval maintenance and returning of faulty notebooks/computers and or the updating of software.

Student communication and new software

There has been an increase in the use of individual telephone lessons with distance education students. At the joint meeting in August 2010, the possibility of the use of Skype or similar software as a means to assist with this new pressure on teachers was raised. Is there any advice as to what progress the Directorate has made in the use of these types of software programs?

Distance education student access to school counsellors

Could you advise the number of hours of school counselling time that would be available for students in distance education settings, both primary and secondary?

In view of the response given by the then Minister for Education and Training Verity Firth to questions from then member for Port Macquarie Mr Peter Besseling (session 54–1) and published in Question and Answers Paper No. 237, to the Minister for Education and Training on November 11 2010:

- What access do distance education students at Camden Haven High School have to school counselling services?
- What plan does the Minister have to provide adequate support to children who use distance education services because of behavioural problems?

The (then) Minister’s responses state:

- “All distance education students are able to receive counselling from a school counsellor either at the school in which they are enrolled or the public school that is local to their residence.
- “Students with severe disruptive behaviour who are not attending a specialist behaviour setting may be eligible to enrol in a Distance Education Centre. This is done through a regional placement panel or process. There is ongoing assessment and support of the student’s needs by the region, with a formal review of the student’s placement at least every 12 months. Students are eligible for support from specialist regional staff such as school counsellors and home school liaison officers.

“Some students with severe disruptive behaviour accessing distance education may also be attending a specialist setting such as a behaviour school or tutorial centre. The Distance Education Centre supports the specialist behaviour setting by providing curriculum access to a key learning area at an appropriate stage level. The students are eligible for support, as appropriate, by staff such as school counsellors and home school liaison officers.”

For your information, the current Distance Education Restricted Committee understands that this information is not being disseminated at the regional or district level in many cases. The Distance Education Restricted Committee, therefore, assumes that distance education settings are either not included on school counsellor lists, or they are being told not to service these schools.

Further, and also on the basis of the Minister’s response on access to school counselling services, how can distance education students experiencing problems such as being school-phobic, long term mental health issues or have had long-term suspensions due to violence, access the school counselling service?

Increased school leaving age

What centralised support is being provided by the Distance Education Directorate to support teachers dealing with the mandatory increased leaving age?

Delayed enrolment procedures

Is the Distance Education Directorate aware of the problems around the enrolment process where schools are enrolling students in single course subjects in distance education settings as late as mid to end of term 1? This puts great pressure on teachers and students. What is the Directorate’s advice to Distance Education Centres dealing with a situation such as this?

Special thanks

The March 10 meeting of the Distance Education Restricted Committee was the last meeting for a number of the members.

A special thanks to Darren Mearrick (Camden Haven Distance Education Centre and High School), John Pemberton (Sydney Distance Education High School), Gianna Pagni (Open High School), Margaret Macdonald (Dubbo School of Distance Education) and Helen Hennessy (Karabar Distance Education Centre and High School) for their work and support of distance education students and teachers.

Welcome

The new members of Distance Education Restricted Committee are Eamon Gormley (Sydney Distance Education High School), Greg Cousens (Camden Haven Distance Education Centre and High School), Hannah Morley (Dubbo School of Distance Education), Jeff Nicholson (distance education coordinator at Ingelburn High School) and Kieran Drabsch (Southern Cross School — Primary). Andy Pavlou (North East Public School of Distance Education — Port Macquarie Campus) has been re-elected to the committee.