NCEC

NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION

RESPONSE TO
REVIEW OF TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION
DISCUSSION PAPER:
Young People, Schools and Innovation:
Towards an action plan for the school sector

1.   Preamble

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) supports the Commonwealth Government's commitment to innovation in Australia's schools through the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education.

In responding to the Discussion Paper: *Young People, Schools and Innovation: Towards an action plan for the school sector*, the NCEC understands that the purpose of the paper is to generate ideas about how to enhance the 'innovative capacity' of Australia's young people and how to promote a culture of innovation amongst teachers, school leaders and education system administrators. In this response, NCEC will offer examples of innovative practice in Catholic education, and seeks to draw out for the Committee's consideration a modest set of recommendations for public policy to enhance a culture of innovation in Australian schools and their students.

NCEC recognizes that the capacity to be 'innovative' is an important attribute for a meaningful and rewarding life as well as for the economic and social well-being of Australia as a whole. Innovation as a concept is related to economic competiveness and growth but it should also be seen as a key concept in promoting social well-being by contributing to human development and quality of life issues. In this era of continual change, young Australians require opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills not only to help them understand and respond to change, but also to exercise initiative and make meaningful differences in the lives of others.

A defining feature of Catholic education is its particular commitment to ensuring that such opportunities are underpinned by an authentic moral and spiritual foundation which enables a person to critically evaluate all the various dimensions of proposed change, in particular the moral and social dimensions of change. Ideally, a student in a Catholic school will not seek innovation for innovation's sake, but will ask what are the consequences of any proposed innovation on the common good, considered not simply in economic terms, but incorporating the basic forms of human good such as truth, aesthetics, friendship and life itself which are essential to human dignity.

At the beginning of this new century, Australia's Catholic schools are faced with new challenges for continuing their mission. The concept of *innovation* is central to the future of Catholic schooling. Innovation is concerned with change and development and may be defined as follows: ***Innovation is the process of exploring new ideas and new types of thinking, resulting in better ways of meeting human needs and new ways of enhancing human dignity.***

This definition is clearly broader than that proposed by the Government in its *Backing Australia's Ability* statement (cited in the Discussion Paper, p.3), with its focus on the production of "tradeable products, processes and services". According to this definition, it would be difficult to innovate in the field of the arts, for example, unless that innovation could be converted into a measurable increase in the gross domestic product. And yet it is often in the field of the arts that innovation has the most profound effects in the lives of people, as they come to view the meaning of their existence in new ways. Similarly, if the positive label of innovation is attributed to any changes that lead to increased economic output, then new and more effective ways of marketing poker machine gambling to disadvantaged communities might be considered "innovative". This is not the kind of kind of activity that should be regarded as genuinely innovative, as it detracts from rather than enhances human dignity and the common good.

2. Challenges in Developing Innovative Capacity and a Culture of Innovation

With this simultaneously expanded and delimited concept of authentic innovation in mind, NCEC concurs with the component challenges identified in the Discussion Paper for developing an innovation action plan for the school sector:
- Learning in a culture of innovation
- Developing a culture of innovation in schools
- Teacher preparation, professional learning and development in a culture of innovation; and
- Leadership at all levels

The questions and issues associated with each of these challenges are complex and inter-related. Schools wishing to foster an innovative capacity in their students need to model innovative teaching and organisational practices to those students, and to do so in ways that demonstrate that the purpose of doing things differently is to improve their educational outcomes and to develop their potential as human beings. Innovation in teaching and school organisation also needs to reinforce to students that ultimately they are responsible for taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them by schools. There is no innovation without initiative and enterprise. At the same time, innovative capacity should be experienced as a characteristic not only of individuals, but also of groups, since most successful innovation is the result of collaboration and cooperation.

The achievement of outcomes demonstrating students' growth in their capacity to be innovative and deal appropriately with change therefore requires
- Teaching which is characterised by intellectual rigour, inclusiveness and relevance and which takes place in a supportive learning environment
- Curriculum which draws upon the wisdom of the past, includes contemporary and essential content, and provides the opportunity for students to explore questions of deep significance to their lives and futures
- Assessment which allows students to demonstrate their learning - intellectually, physically, social, morally, spiritually and aesthetically
- School organisation and planning which supports the effective provision of learning opportunities to students, and makes best use of the support available from parents, education systems and departments, governments and related agencies and organisations.
- Educational leadership (by teachers, school and system executive, professional associations, teacher unions, teacher educators, employing authorities and governments) which is exercised in ways which respect the expertise, responsibilities and perspectives of these groups, and is focused on the development of students' full potential as human beings.

3.   Examples of Innovative Practice

Initiatives put in place by State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions illustrate the scope of these challenges, and identify factors currently supporting innovation in Australia's Catholic schools. These examples highlight approaches to developing innovative capacity in students and a culture of innovation in schools.   Some of the examples have been provided in the submissions from the Catholic Education Commission Victoria and from Catholic Education South Australia. Full details for the others are provided in the Appendix to this submission.

Innovative Capacity – Learning in a Culture of Innovation

Trinity College Astronomy and Laser Cutting Projects **(WA):** Trinity College owns and operates a *Ritchey-Chretien Cassegrain* 31.5 cm (12.5") telescope built by Star Instruments of the USA. This is a highly technological design and incorporates features such as superb optics delivering coma-free images, carbon fibre tubing that removes thermal tube flexure, and mirror air circulation fans. The telescope is connected to a highly accurate and manoeuvrable mount capable of slewing and tracking all manner of astronomical objects, even fast moving artificial satellites. Once the appropriate software is downloaded, students from other schools can connect to the Trinity College Observatory (TCO) and operate the telescope. To do this, a booking is required. Last year Trinity College also purchased a Epilog Laser CLASS 111A. Students have access via an IP address. Students at CBC Fremantle for example can design a product on their computer using a CAD program and then dial in to the Laser IP address allowing them to activate the laser cutter to produce their design at Trinity College.

Innovation at School Level

Geelong Science Mentor Cluster **(Vic):***Sacred Heart College, Geelong* has developed a collaborative partnership with 10 primary schools in the local area. The aim of this cluster initiative is to improve teaching and learning in science making it more engaging, relevant and accessible to students. Learning in science has been enhanced through the utilisation of a broader range of sources of expertise. Students visit local engineering and computer firms to enrich their learning. They also support a number of community based activities, such as, the science Camp to Canberra, the Science Week program, the Science Club and Open Day displays.

ICT at St Vincent de Paul's Strathmore **(Vic):** At this schools ICT is being utilised to support and enhance learning rather than as a stand alone tool. Different elements of ICT are implemented within the various stages of inquiry. As well as providing opportunities for hands-on use of technology for students, teachers also aim to model the use of ICT tools in their teaching. ICT use involves using the internet as a resource for engaging students and stimulating thinking as well as for research. Software applications such as Inspiration, PowerPoint, Word and iMovie are used as teaching and learning tools and student presentation of learning. Professional development has also focussed on the development and use of graphic organisers to encourage higher-order thinking.

Innovation in Professional Development and Teacher Training

Connecting with Culture **(WA):** a professional development program for educators who will be taking up a position or who are working with Indigenous students in Western Australian schools. It is a cultural awareness program and is supported by interactive media and on-line delivery.

Acquiring Information Literacy **(NSW):** A simple yet significant project funded by the Commonwealth Quality Teacher Programme. This project is managed by the Wilcannia Forbes Diocesan Education Office. It is unusual in that the project and support staff 'come to you'. This

can be very significant when you are a small isolated rural school. This Diocese covers the western half of NSW with its many small rural communities. The wonderful aspect of the project is that the teacher development occurs using the local IT infrastructure, regional bandwidth, school timetable, locally available software and teachers with their students in their own classroom. The project officer models teaching, team teaches and engages with all aspects of the class, the school and community over a week long visit. These schools are left with the skills, energy and impetus to continue with their learning in this emerging area. Ongoing encouragement and support is provided through an online network of like-positioned teachers located all over far western NSW.

Innovation at System Level

Cathednet **(CEOWA):** In 2002 CEOWA introduced a purpose-designed broadband telecommunications network that is providing a means of more comprehensive education delivery for the entire Catholic education system in Western Australia. Cathednet fosters a collaborative approach. It is enabling schools to share resources and equipment between schools. It is as simple as dialling into the appropriate IP address. Collaboration and co-operation has a number of advantages as it is cost efficient, avoiding duplication of resources and equipment and it enables schools to specialise and share resources and equipment between schools. It has enabled a number of innovations in curriculum delivery opportunities, particularly in our rural and remote schools such as the Trinity astronomy and laser cutting projects (see above).

Alternative Models of Principalship **(QCEC):** The Queensland Catholic Education Commission is coordinating a research and development project focussed on leadership succession in Catholic schools. This project is being implemented through 6 'sub-projects' each of which addresses an identified issue within leadership succession. One of these sub-projects focuses on *Alternative Models of Principalship.* This project represents an innovative approach to problem solving by system level leadership. Its purpose is to address the task of preserving a quality supply of principals for Catholic schools in Queensland. The specific purpose is to seek to identify alternative models of principalship that reflect the world-views of project participants.

The project is being jointly sponsored by QCEC and the Australian Principal Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC). Two parallel research projects will be conducted under this sub-project's banner:
- *Towards an Understanding of the Views of Teachers Aged 25-35 Years Regarding Principalship in Queensland Schools.*
- *Towards an Understanding of the Views of Women Teachers Regarding Principalship in Queensland Schools.*

The assumption underlying the research is that young teachers, as a cohort, and women teachers, as a cohort, may well hold views different from many current principals and system administrators about the nature of principalship, the place of principalship in their life plans, and what actually attracts them to, or deters them from, applying for principalship.

Connections **(ACTCEO):** Connections was a process to help students, staff, parents and school communities explore what they value and hope to achieve as members of an 'education system'. The process was focussed on the themes of Faith, Education, People and Innovation and designed to assist discussion about values, current practices and possible futures for Catholic education in the ACT and surrounding NSW. The process was supported through a Discussion Paper, Workshop and On-line Resources, and a series of conferences based around each theme. Outcomes were reported and disseminated as a series of guidelines (or 'Signposts') to assist in review and planning processes. Further information can be found at
http://vision.cangoul.catholic.edu.au/ideas/connections/index.htm

## 4.	Lessons from Innovative Practice examples

From the above examples of innovation-in-action within the Catholic sector, the following principles for success in promoting innovation can be identified:

- Teachers are key agents of innovation, and need 'space' and support in their day-to-day work to learn, reflect, evaluate and develop their practice.
- Schools require adequate resources and flexibility within system and government guidelines to adapt their organisational arrangements to meet the needs of students and the demands and opportunities available from parents and local communities.
- High quality and innovative leadership is important in creating a culture of innovation.
- Development of a culture of innovation in schools occurs through partnership between schools, parents, local agencies, systems and governments. Shared contributions of funding and other resources from these parties builds a sense of shared ownership which can lead to further innovation at the local level.
- The rationale for innovation should be based on enhancing the full potential of students, not simply developing students whose innovative capacity is to be measured according to whether or not it meets the perceived needs of business and industry.
- Successful innovation in the school sector requires supportive or enabling policy not just in education policy, but in other areas of public policy (including but not limited to, for example, information and communications technology, Indigenous affairs) as well as wide ranging community support.

## 5.	Recommendations

In light the experience of Catholic education authorities, NCEC recommends to the Review that a proposed action plan for innovation in the Australian school sector include:

- **An inclusive and comprehensive statement of intent** based upon the objectives of the Government's innovation statement *Backing Australia's Ability*, and *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, emphasising the role of schooling to foster the intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development of students, as well to equip them with the so-called 'employability skills'. This will require a refinement of the concept of innovation, such that innovation incorporates not only economic competitiveness and growth but is also a key concept in promoting social well-being by contributing to human development and quality of life issues. A culture of innovation in Australian schools and wider society should value the complementary nature of general and vocational education. Such a statement would incorporate a set of principles to assist in evaluating innovations and guiding innovation processes.

- **Strategic planning and consultation processes** convened by the Commonwealth with the support of MCEETYA, and involving employing authorities, teacher education institutions, professional associations, teacher unions, parent groups and student representatives.

- **Priority and strategy for cross-portfolio collaboration at the Commonwealth level in policy development and programme delivery that supports innovation in school education.** One aspect of such a strategy could be the identification of a suite of relatively concrete and specific portfolio outcomes that are shared across a number of portfolios and agencies (for example, health, family and community services, employment, business and industry, communication, the arts, Treasury and Finance, The Australian Bureau of Statistics, and the National Office of the Information Economy), thus providing the framework and the motivation for collaboration and "joined-up government".