

**Questions on Notice:  
Inquiry into the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011  
Professor Philip Cam**

Questions from the Hon Sarah Mitchell:

1. In your appearance before the committee, you mentioned that you had been involved with the training of over 100 volunteer ethics teachers. Can you please provide the committee with more information on what was included in the training program?
2. Given that Primary Ethics in their appearance indicated that they had a high rate of retention amongst their volunteers, it would be reasonable to assume that some of the teachers you helped train are still teaching in schools today. Do you feel the training provided to volunteers is adequate? If not, can you provide information on how you feel the training could be improved?
3. Other witnesses have raised the idea of introducing a comparative religion course, a philosophy based course or a general religion course, to take the place of either SEE or SRE (or in some cases both). Do you have any thoughts on these suggestions?

## Replies to Questions on Notice from the Hon Sarah Mitchell

1. The original training program for the ethics pilot, and the first round of training for Primary Ethics, consisted of two full days of workshops. Two things need to be borne in mind here. First, the ethics teachers were parents and interested members of the community. While they had to meet certain criteria for selection, experience as a primary classroom teacher was not one of them. Secondly, in light of this, the procedures to be used in teaching the lessons in the pilot curriculum were tightly scripted, and consisted in a set of activities that, while they dealt with a variety of topics, were a set of variations of one another from a methodological point of view. The facilitation of reasoned discussion and dialogue also lay at the core of each lesson. This meant that the workshops could be largely treated as opportunities to run the lessons in something close to classroom mode with the trainees as participants. There was also, of course, discussion about the lessons and the program overall. Time was also taken up with organisational matters and ensuring that the participants had an understanding of their wider responsibilities, but I wasn't involved in that side of things.
2. I do not know who is currently providing the training for Primary Ethics, and I also have very limited knowledge of the details of the lessons that are being delivered in the classroom. I believe (but do not know for a fact) that the two day workshop program is still being used. I have no hesitation in saying that a two day training program represents a bare minimum for the kind of tightly scripted lessons that I wrote for the pilot when conducted by someone who really knows the ropes. One of my concerns is that (again as far as I know) a train-the-trainer model is being used—and understandably so, given the need to meet a rapidly expanding demand. This has the drawback that the trainer is quite likely to be inadequately prepared, having had little more experience than the participants they are training. That's a worry. I would much prefer a training program that ran as a night class over a semester, giving the trainees more time to learn about teaching techniques and the subject they are teaching.
3. I understand that there is already a general religion course available in the curriculum, although I am led to believe that it is not much taught. With regard to the SRE slot, the only suggestion I have to make is the one I touched upon when I was before the committee. A course based on philosophy would form the natural complement to Scripture and be suitable for students who have opted out of it. Philosophy incorporates many other areas besides ethics, and would get students thinking about all of the fundamental kinds of questions posed by religion, but without faith-based commitments. Students who are not being brought up within a faith are almost certainly not being brought to address these questions as things stand. That is a serious lacuna in their education.

Philip Cam