Real Learning
Real Futures
Revisited

Roger Holdsworth

THE DERWENT DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP
Bothwell District High, Bridgewater High, Claremont High,
Cosgrove High, Derwent Support Services,
Glenora District High, New Norfolk High,
Oatlands District High, Ouse District High, Rosetta High
with Derwent District, Tasmanian Department of Education

Australian Youth Research Centre
The University of Melbourne
June 2005
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was carried out with the support of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum; their ongoing commitment to exploring diversity within educational programs in order that these meet the needs of all students is both admired and appreciated.

The enthusiastic support of the Real Learning/Real Futures Management Group in guiding this review is strongly acknowledged, as is the positive contributions and cheerful cooperation of RL/RF project coordinators and grade coordinators in the schools involved. Particular note should also be made of the enormous work of Cluny Addis in facilitating this Review and supplying information and advice, and of the commitment, facilitation and belief of Bob Phillips as District Superintendent in the (previous) Derwent District.


This current document is published by the Australian Youth Research Centre and is also available electronically on the above Dusseldorp Skills Forum website.
Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

The Real Learning Real Futures (RL/RF) Program was developed within the Derwent District in Tasmania to meet individual needs (enhanced participation and success for students who are not experiencing that) and systemic needs (development of appropriate curriculum for all students that encourages increased rates of participation).

The Program draws upon ideas of ‘at risk’ and ‘mainstream’, but goes beyond that to explore ways of stepping outside the isolation and separation of some students, and of developing learning approaches that are applicable to all students. It also involves high-level cooperation between all Derwent District secondary schools, which pool resources to provide a shared range of community-based and community-focused learning projects for students throughout the District.

The Derwent secondary principals described the Program’s rationale as: “managing and retaining students centres on engaging students in authentic learning projects…” Partnerships between schools and their respective communities provide greater opportunities than those available to individual schools working on their own. This project seeks to develop a collaborative approach to addressing issues of participation, attendance and retention in the Derwent District.”

The RL/RF Program began operations at the start of 2003, following discussion and development late in 2002.

This Working Paper provides a ‘one-year-on’ glimpse of the Real Learning/Real Futures (RL/RF) Program that is operating in a network of nine schools (plus Derwent Support Services) in the Derwent District in Tasmania. An initial report at the end of 2003 outlined the Program after its first year of operation and presented some recommendations for improved operations. This Report revisits those recommendations and asks about their implementation. It also looks at the Program’s goals and asks about achievements against these.

The three main features of the Program are:

- The ten schools with secondary enrolments in the Derwent District work collaboratively to provide a linked set of projects which are characterised as having hands-on/experiential approaches, developing high engagement of student interest and student ownership, and operating in small groups;
- The projects are ‘authentic’ insofar as they use project based learning methods that involve real projects, real timeframes and real outcomes;
- The Program has a strong student support component with mentoring and work placements a feature.

THE PROGRAM IN 2004

Real Learning/Real Futures (RL/RF) continued to develop its operations in 2004. The eLearning component of the Program has been substantially planned and is ready for initial operation in 2005. It is, as yet, unclear as to the full scope of this component’s implementation. It will also be important to plan clearly for the integration of eLearning with Project Based Learning, and for strategies to enable ‘at risk’ students to fully access and utilise it.

Departmental restructuring in 2004 following acceptance of the Essential Learning for All Report (Atelier Learning Solutions, June 2004) had an enormous impact on the Program.
The District, which played a strong role in convening and supporting the Program, will no longer exist in 2005, and schools in the Network have been restructured into a series of local Clusters (with primary and other schools). This has made funding options uncertain and delayed essential planning for 2005. In turn this will mean that 2005 will, in many ways, see a continuation of the 2004 RL/RF activities while the program considers its financial and organisational directions.

Similarly, restrictions on the job roles of Youth Learning Officers (YLOs) have meant that support for the RL/RF Executive Officer position has had to be found elsewhere.

Despite these challenges, the RL/RF Network has made a commitment to continue in 2005 on the same basis as in 2004, and to institute a business development model for financial operation in 2006 and beyond.

The decision to continue has enabled planning for a ‘common Thursday’ to proceed between the schools, in order to attempt to minimise disruptive influences of students coming out of classes to attend RL/RF activities throughout the week.

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

The Project Based Learning component of the Program shows clear signs of becoming more developed and settled – ‘more entrenched’ in schools’ cultures and operations – in its second year of operation. Some of these indications are:

• a dramatic decrease in the expressed concerns of other staff about students ‘missing classes’;
• an increased willingness for ‘at risk’ students to attend activities;
• organisational procedures becoming more settled and predictable (if no less onerous);
• increased understanding around ideas of ‘authentic learning’ and about ways in which projects can develop in this direction;
• increased documentation and formalisation of project goals, approaches and assessment – though this continues to be a priority.

While there is substantial anecdotal evidence of achievements of positive outcomes for participating students, and of overall achievement of Program goals, this is not yet born out in available District statistics. It is considered that the anecdotes and stories are ‘leading’ the patterns, which may take some time to emerge, and may not in any case be able to be clearly attributed to RL/RF.

However, there is still a lack of availability of analysed data at a school level in areas of retention, attendance, suspensions etc that may indicate some local patterns that would be of interest. For example, it has been suggested that gathering, analysing and presenting attendance data on some individual students, particularly those ‘at risk’, who have been involved with RL/RF, may show significant patterns associated with the activities.

The Program has a clearer indication of its achievement of inclusion of ‘at risk’ students, with approximately 27% of students and program places in this category. (There could be a clearer definition shared between schools, as there seems to be substantial differences in these numbers from school to school, which may represent different definitions.)

CHALLENGES: AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following areas have been noted for further development within the Program in 2005:

• **Assessment:** It is essential that, as the project descriptions develop in line with the Essential Learnings, clear assessment information about the achievements of individual students be kept and sent back to their schools. The development of the eLearning Network will facilitate capture and processing of this.

• **Communication and Motivation:** Information to teachers and students about the nature of at least some of the projects needs to be made available in more detail. It is suggested that student participants could play a strong role in formally presenting information and examples to other students through displays, demonstrations or ‘tasters’.

• **Celebration:** It is suggested that some form of whole-Program celebration be planned at the end of the year that would enable all students to draw together what they’d done, tell each other about achievements, celebrate successful outcomes and also reflect on their learning (and higher order thinking).
• **Selection of Projects:** An emerging challenge for RL/RF will be to be more ‘selective’ and strategic about the nature of the projects being included. What assumptions are being made about what students need or about what will engage them? How do these relate to abilities of schools to offer these?

• **Structure of Project Time:** It is clear that students from some schools, particularly District High Schools, cannot access some projects because of projects’ organisational structures (in particular, small project time allocations between lengthy travel times). In addition, in some cases, the organisational arrangements for a project mean that sessional staff are less involved with the overall Program operation (and this will have implications for teaching and learning approaches, for assessment, for specification and achievement of objectives and so on). The program will need to examine the implications of the ways in which projects are offered (the length and placements of times) to ensure access for all students, and effective participation of staff.

• **Staff Development:** There is a need for further staff development – and this will be particularly important for both teachers and non-teacher mentors – in two main areas: effective teaching and learning approaches with ‘at risk’ students; and understanding of project goals and assessments.

• **Economics:** The provision of these projects is expensive for the schools. The Program remains dependent on pooling special program funding to the schools, but this will be uncertain in the long term. The Program must have a priority on gaining some form of on-going assurances of funding (eg in some other states, central Youth Development funding is around $450 p.a. per student for similar individual school programs) and/or seeking ways to offer the Program at lesser financial cost to schools.

The implementation of a ‘common Thursday’ for RL/RF activities will probably take place in schools in the Network in 2005. This may ease some organisational issues, but may create others. Its impact will need to be monitored, particularly in the area of possibly making RL/RF projects ‘less special’ to students. The program is planning a diversity of organisational forms and this is strongly endorsed.

Time remains a key factor in the implementation of RL/RF. Both grade coordinators and project coordinators regularly identify the lack of time to complete their roles satisfactorily. As RL/RF requires further areas to develop – principally course planning, student assessment and communication of outcomes – these pressures will increase. The program needs to monitor these time pressures to ensure that staff are able to meet these requirements, and to plan ways to ease time pressures through provision of pro formas and formatted procedures. It is suggested that, for example, recording of student assessments through a digital portfolio might eventually ease some time pressures, but in the short term, while it is being introduced, this is also likely to increase pressures.

**WIDER INTEREST**

The Program continues to draw widespread interest both within the State and from visitors. It continues to be seen as a model for inter-school cooperation, for development of ‘authentic learning’ and for the development of non-deficit curriculum approaches that extend educational access and success to ‘at risk’ students.

Two new schools will probably join the Network in 2005. The criteria of geographical proximity (to enable inter-school travel) and of compatibility of need, have been adopted. It also continues to be important that other schools be encouraged, through provision of organisational models, to establish similar approaches in their own areas. This implies a clear focus on and communication of the essential features of RL/RF.

Internally, the extension of RL/RF approaches within the participating schools is important. RL/RF participants are learning important lessons about the needs of ‘at risk’ students and about structure and processes of curriculum that responds to those needs. This experience should be regarded as a valuable asset within the professional development of staff within the schools in this network. Supporting such staff to present information about what they do (there are some staff who still, reportedly, have little idea of what RL/RF is) and how they teach, would also assist these people to reflect on their on-going practices.
Background

In October 2003, the Australian Youth Research Centre carried out an initial brief evaluation and review of the Real Learning/Real Futures (RL/RF) Program, a partnership of ten schools with the Derwent District of the Tasmanian Department of Education. This review was conducted with the support of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. The Review Report was subsequently published (in print and electronic form) by the DSF (February 2004).

The Review addressed two major needs: for a public documentation of the processes and outcomes of the Program through a ‘snapshot’ of its operations in October 2003; and a reflection of Program needs and directions for the Program operators. In addition, a further brief reflection summarised program lessons within a broader context.

PHASE 1 REVIEW: 2003

ORIGINAL PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In that first Report, the Program was summarised as:

The Real Learning Real Futures (RLRF) Program has been developed as a response to the needs of students and schools within the Derwent District in Tasmania. These needs are both individual (enhanced participation and success for students who are not experiencing that) and systemic (development of appropriate curriculum for all students that encourages increased rates of participation).

The Program’s operation therefore draws upon ideas of ‘at risk’ and ‘mainstream’, but goes beyond that to explore ways of stepping outside the isolation and separation of some students, and of developing learning approaches that are applicable to all students.

Thirdly, the Program involves high-level cooperation between all ten Derwent secondary schools, which pool resources to provide a shared range of learning projects for students throughout the District.

The Derwent secondary principals have written in their introduction to the Program that they “believe that managing and retaining students centres on engaging students in authentic learning projects. Present strategies, including the current MARSSS (Managing and Retaining Secondary Students at Risk) programs have made a significant impact in our schools. However, to maximise the effectiveness of the total resource, partnerships between schools and their respective communities provide greater opportunities than those available to individual schools working on their own. This project seeks to develop a collaborative approach to addressing issues of participation, attendance and retention in the Derwent District.”

The RL/RF Program began operations at the start of 2003, following discussion and development late in 2002. It also built on existing projects and approaches in some of the participating schools and in Derwent Support Services. These approaches had focused on placement of students, particularly those deemed ‘at risk’ of not successfully completing schooling, in a variety of community locations for various lengths of time.

In 2003, these approaches have been extended and formalised between the schools. The three main features of the Program are:

1. The ten schools with secondary enrolments in the Derwent District work collaboratively to provide a linked set of projects which are characterised as having hands-on/experiential approaches, develop high engagement of student
interest and student ownership, and operate in small groups;
b. The projects are ‘authentic’ insofar as they use project based learning methods that involve real projects, real timeframes and real outcomes;
c. The Program has a strong student support component with mentoring and work placements a feature.

**BROADER IMPLICATIONS**

In the previous Report, the broader curriculum implications of the RL/RF Program were also outlined. These comments still remain relevant:

There are many current examples of ‘alternatives’ in education – but most of these involve identifying and separating out students who are seen as not achieving success. Most of these alternatives do not initially involve positive choices for these young people – even if the longer-term outcomes are positive for them. The simple act of referring a young person to an ‘alternative program’ says something about that person, and the impact of that identification on the young person needs to be carefully considered.

Some of these ‘alternative education’ examples involve groups of schools combining funding and other resources to set up a unit that provides learning activities that are seen as more relevant to the needs of participants. Some of these examples are regarded (by participants and the base schools) as providing a ‘respite’ for schools or students, or aim to provide students with skills (learning skills, behavioural skills and appropriate attitudes) before returning them to ‘mainstream’ settings.

Over many years, various criticisms have been made of such models: they focus on behavioural characteristics of individuals – particularly in a deficit mode; they focus on ‘fixing’ students; the situations and approaches within schools remain un-touched (in the worst of cases, students are returned to an unchanged situation that has contributed to the ‘problem’); they disconnect students from the broad range of on-going options – they are ‘dead-end’ courses; they concentrate students with ‘problems’ in isolation from other students; and on a broader canvas, they marginalise structural solutions as ‘alternative’ to an unchanging ‘mainstream’.

On the other hand, such ‘alternatives’ have enabled resources to be targeted to students most in need; have established different forms of student-adult and student-student relationships; have been flexible in content and approach and thus more likely to be responsive to students’ needs; and have enabled different and innovative approaches to be tried that have, over a longer term, influenced ‘mainstream’ practices.

In this report on the Real Learning Real/Futures Program, we have documented a different approach – one in which a group of schools combines to provide joint activities that are both targeted and inclusive; that connect to future learning and development; that are continuous with and part of the schools’ overall curriculum.

It is always difficult to advance a model of practice. There is a danger in attempting to transplant one success to a different context: circumstances will be substantially different; the process of ‘getting there’ (ie of thinking through appropriate responses) is as important as (or more so than) the destination. Further, there is the difficulty that any example of practice that is self-reflective and developing, will be ‘imperfect’ and necessarily focusing on areas where improvement is needed. Thus it will always be open to the challenge: ‘There are problems there!’

However, we can also identify principles that underlie existing practices, and that provide ‘touchstones’ for others to consider. Here there are three important principles that can inform the arguments, planning and implementation of other schools:

- **the inclusive nature of the student cohort:**

  Here ‘inclusion’ means that a special effort is made to **include those students previously excluded** from access to success. Students are not separated from others within the Program, but a ‘mixed group’ is formed according to interest and need. However, schools maintain a specific and rigorous focus on ensuring that those students previously excluded, get to participate and achieve success here. They do that through structuring the nature of activities to be appropriate to needs, and through provision of support and encouragement for individual students;

- **the applied nature of the activities:**

  A set of activities is designed to meet the needs of the student cohort, which involves:
hands-on learning;
authentic learning (including grappling with what this means in practice);
learning that opens on-going opportunities.

- a group of schools cooperating together, with a shared vision and trust:

All schools contribute to and gain from the Program. They share a common approach, adopt a cooperative framework and gain benefits greater than they would from their separate contributions. However it needs also to be recognised that there is a need for assured resourcing for such an approach. Cooperation and collaboration is not a matter of cost-saving; rather, to achieve effective work between these schools, there has been both a pooling of existing resources and the allocation of funding to coordination mechanisms: someone to administer the group, transport, project resources. To some extent this has involved a re-arrangement of existing and separate funding in a way that makes its allocation more effective and efficient. The role of the District in providing that coordination, in approving that re-arrangement, and of adding District resources is vital to the success of a group project.

Assurances about funding also need to be provided over a substantial time period. The changes to curriculum within individual schools as well as the operation of an inter-school Program take time to develop. A commitment of support for at least a three to five year period is vital, as is a recognition that the Program will develop and change over that time.

In this way, an agreement to regard the development of a Program as action research underpins the lessons and successes of the Program. This means:
- shared identification of needs;
- the development of proposals to respond to these needs;
- a willingness to initiate action and commit resources to it;
- a commitment to data collection;
- an honesty in data analysis, reflection on progress and barriers, and modification of directions.

These are the continuing lessons of good practice. The Real Learning/Real Futures Program provides a concrete example of this in operation. Their successes as well as their struggles inform possibilities for substantial practical directions in ‘alternative education’.

EVALUATION

NEEDS 2004

It was recognised that the RL/RF Program was in its first year of operation in 2003, and that it had adopted an ‘action research’ approach in which it was committed to reflect on Program achievements and processes, and to adapt its operations accordingly. Thus the recommendations in the Report defined some possible directions for the Program to consider. In 2004, it was decided that it would be valuable to reflect again on the Program’s experience in considering and, where appropriate, implementing these recommendations. What has been learnt from doing that?

The Program in its second year has already expanded, particularly in e-learning directions, and there is a need to update Program descriptions, to learn from these initiatives and to reflect again on possible Program directions.

Thus this further evaluation in 2004 looks at:

a) the implementation of the quality improvement measures suggested in the initial evaluation, to better understand how the program has developed, and what practice barriers and promoters exist; in particular, it has been suggested that the extent to which authentic learning has been developed and what needs to be done to further improve opportunities for authentic learning are especially important.

b) the nature of the outcomes for students from participation in the Program and how these can be continuously improved.
1. OVERALL PLAN

When initially planned, it was intended that the Real Learning/Real Futures (RL/RF) Program should have the following structure:

![Diagram of Real Learning/Real Futures Program]

This project was planned to have three interlinked components:

(i) Project based learning;
(ii) Online learning;
(iii) Work/Enterprise.

These components were designed to reflect the Essential Learnings as developed within and by the Tasmanian Department of Education.

In 2003, we reported exclusively on the Project Based Learning component, as this was the first and (at that time) only part of the Program in operation. In 2004, the e-Learning or On-line Learning component has been planned and this will begin in 2005. An initial description of this is included in this Report.

However, the Report starts by providing some up-dated information on the operation of the Project Based Learning component.

2. PROJECT BASED LEARNING

BACKGROUND

In the previous report, we identified three basic principles that underpinned the Program and that "inform (its) arguments, planning and implementation":

- **the inclusive nature of the student cohort:**
  
  Here 'inclusion' means that a special effort is made to include those students previously excluded from access to success. Students are not separated from others within the Program, but a 'mixed group' is formed according to interest and need. However, schools maintain a specific and rigorous focus on ensuring that those students previously excluded, get to participate and achieve success here. They do that through structuring the nature of activities to be appropriate to needs, and through provision of support and encouragement for individual students.

- **the applied nature of the activities:**
  
  A set of activities is designed to meet the needs of the student cohort, which involves:
  
  o hands-on learning;
  o authentic learning (including grappling with what this means in practice);
  o learning that opens on-going opportunities.
• a group of schools cooperating together, with a shared vision and trust:

All schools contribute to and gain from the Program. They share a common approach, adopt a cooperative framework and gain benefits greater than those they would from their separate contributions.

The Program defines project-based learning in the following terms:

• Learning experiences which engage students in complex, real-world projects through which they develop and apply skills and knowledge.

• A strategy that recognises that significant learning taps students’ inherent drive to learn, capability to do important work, and the need to be taken seriously.

• Learning in which results are not predetermined or fully predictable.

• Learning which requires students to draw from many information sources and disciplines in order to solve problems.

• Learning which requires students to coordinate time, work schedules and project outcomes in order to accomplish project goals on a predicted time schedule.

The Network of schools cooperate to offer such activities to students in Grades 9 and 10. While specific attention is paid to the needs of students seen as ‘at risk’ by schools, it is important to RL/RF that these projects involve a mixed group of students. This avoids program stigmatisation, and also provides positive role modeling for active participation and commitment. At a school level, Grade 9/10 coordinators select a mix of students for the available places on the basis of students’ interest (which might be career related) and specific student need – an assessment of the value of participation for certain students. The number of places available for each of the schools in any one project is determined on a pro rata basis, with the ability for schools to ‘trade’ places between projects.

The general model has been that of withdrawal of students from classes for participation in week-long, day-long or part-day activities (for a short or an extended period) at one school or in a community location. Projects are operated throughout the District, throughout the week and throughout the year.

In 2003, approximately 13 projects operated at some stage throughout the year. These projects offered students a variety of hands-on learning experiences: as ‘tasters’ for future possible careers, as opportunities to experience fun activities with other students, as socialising experiences, as specific skill development, as extension of students’ experiences beyond those they had previously encountered, and as engagement with significant problem solving and production of community-level outcomes – the criteria for ‘authentic learning’. Most projects had and continue to have a mix of all these intentions.

The Program design emphasises a commitment to ‘authentic learning’, which involves:

• construction of knowledge: analysing or interpreting information to solve a problem that can’t be solved by information retrieval alone;

• disciplined inquiry: a deep understanding of a problem or issue;

• aesthetic, utilitarian or personal value: making connections to the world beyond the classroom, and having an impact on others.

It was clear in 2003 that not all projects met those criteria. It was suggested that the Program examine project intentions, recognising the value of a coherent plan for what is offered, and seek ways to encourage each project to become more ‘authentic’.

The Program also continues to be interested in the impact of RL/RF on the nature of curriculum being offered within the participating schools: to broaden the concept of a ‘mainstream’ and to avoid the isolation of such approaches as ‘alternative’. Schools are still being challenged to determine how, in both conceptual and organisational terms, the RL/RF projects can be integrated with other curriculum programs.

PROJECT BASED LEARNING OPERATION IN 2004

In 2004, the same schools plus Derwent Support Services formed the Network. Most members (all except Ouse DHS) organised at least one activity during the year. A total of 17 different activities operated during the year. Some of these operated several times, and some in several locations.

Students

A total of 505 students took part in 723 placements during the year, with many students therefore taking part in more than one activity. A further analysis of these figures is provided below.

Each school has provided information about the students who took part in RL/RF activities during the year. The following table starts with schools’ overall enrolments and the numbers in the target Grade 9-10 cohort. This table then summarises the number of students from each school who took part in at least one RL/RF activity, and the total number of RL/RF places per school.

Each school was also asked to designate the ‘at risk’ students involved (though no consistent definition of ‘at risk’ was provided for them). This then enables us to calculate the percentage of the Grade 9-10 cohort who have been involved in RL/RF in 2004, the percentage of students (and places) taken up by ‘at risk’ students, and the ratio of RL/RF places to RL/RF students (ie an indicator of the average number of placements per student) both for the whole cohort and for the ‘at risk’ students. (What we don’t know is the total number of ‘at risk’ students designated in the overall Grade 9-10
cohort in order to see if these students are being involved to a greater or lesser degree than other students.)

There also seem to be different patterns between High Schools and District High Schools, both in terms of who accesses RL/RF (at some District High Schools, students other than Grade 9-10 are involved) and what activities they access. So the two sets of schools have been separated on the following table to highlight similarities and comparisons.

It can be noted here that the students from District High Schools are, on average, each accessing more activities than those in High Schools (1.76 activities each cf 1.32) but that ‘at risk’ students in District High Schools are accessing slightly fewer activities than their fellow students in these schools (1.68 cf 1.76), while ratios are fairly similar in High Schools (1.45 cf 1.43). District High Schools also define a higher percentage of their RL/RF students as ‘at risk’ than do High Schools (33% cf 25%).

**Activities**

The activities in 2004 are similar to those offered in 2003, though with some variations. The new activities in 2004 are asterisked (*); Artisans (2003) has been replaced by Fabrication.

**Aquaculture**

2004’s program ran over two consecutive days.

The aim of the program was to introduce students to the commercial and recreational aspects of the aquaculture industry.

**Day 1: The Central Tasmanian Aquaculture Centre, Oatlands School:**

Students are introduced to the running of the aquaculture centre with an emphasis on the practical day to day testing and maintenance of equipment and fish; and develop some skills in fly tying and casting.

**Day 2: Salmon Ponds Hatchery and Lake Meadowbank:**

Students compare and contrast the running of a commercial hatchery and aquaculture centre; and try their luck trout fishing at Lake Meadowbank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Population</th>
<th>Grade 9-10 Cohort</th>
<th>Number of RL/RF Students</th>
<th>RL/RF Students as % of cohort</th>
<th>Number of RL/RF Places</th>
<th>RL/RF places as % of cohort</th>
<th>Ratio of places to students</th>
<th>Number of school defined ‘at risk’ students</th>
<th>% of at risk students in RL/RF</th>
<th>Number of RL/RF places by ‘at risk’</th>
<th>% of at risk places</th>
<th>Ratio of at risk places to at-risk students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bothwell</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>19 (18%)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>142 (26)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>70 (14)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>64 (8%)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78 (12)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ouse</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>12 (12%)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>142 (16)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DHS Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>862</strong></td>
<td><strong>141 (16%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>89 (15)</strong></td>
<td><strong>222</strong></td>
<td><strong>157</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
<td><strong>31%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>DHS Average</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>Bridgewater</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>214 (54%)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>36 (19)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.22</td>
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<td>354</td>
<td>181 (51%)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>38 (19)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>249</td>
<td>121 (49%)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>52 (25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Norfolk</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>160 (50%)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>49 (25)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosetta</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>295 (47%)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>32 (15)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>1944</strong></td>
<td><strong>971 (50%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>379</strong></td>
<td><strong>39 (20)</strong></td>
<td><strong>501</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
<td><strong>25%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Average</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>2806</strong></td>
<td><strong>1112 (40%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>505</strong></td>
<td><strong>45 (18)</strong></td>
<td><strong>723</strong></td>
<td><strong>135</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>196</strong></td>
<td><strong>27%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Average</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
possibly putting to use flies created on the previous day.

Organised through Oatlands DHS; 14 students from 6 schools.

Aquatics Week Camp

Two single-gender camps were held. The Aquatics Camps gave students a week long experience based on water sports and water safety they would have difficulty accessing for themselves.

The range of activities includes:
- boat safety and licence;
- sailing;
- canoeing, rowing and kayaking;
- wind surfing;
- snorkelling;
- environmental issues (water watch).

Organised through Rosetta HS; 36 students from 7 schools

Bricklaying

Students undertook an introductory course in bricklaying and got to build simple structures. These courses were each conducted over three full days.

Organised through Bothwell DHS; 33 students from 8 schools

Community Garden *

The Garden advertised itself to students as: ‘Our Nursery… Your Garden’. Do you want to work outside? Do you want to help run a plant nursery? Do you want to help develop an urban forest of endangered species? Do you want to learn about the propagation of plants? Do you want to work in a nursery?

Eight half days – afternoons

Organised through Cosgrove HS; 12 students from 5 schools

Community Play Group

The Cosgrove Community Learning Centre Playgroup ran every Tuesday morning at Cosgrove High School. The playgroup was attended by parents of the community and their pre-school aged children. Students were given the opportunity to prepare and implement activities suitable for children of this age group, and experienced various aspects involved in childcare. These included: establishing a child-safe environment, setting up equipment for a playgroup, communicating with children of different levels of language development, teaching different motor skills through craft activities and games, encouraging a supportive social environment through positive reinforcements and role-modelling, and witnessing the level of care involved in raising children.

This year there was a different theme each month, so students could develop and run activities related to these broad themes over a few weeks (these included such themes as transport, winter, Olympics and fairy tales). Students were encouraged to be actively involved with the children at the Playgroup, and to learn their names and interests, in order that their time spent with them is as beneficial as possible.

The Playgroup was a unique project, and allowed students to experience working with children first hand in an authentic childcare environment. This project was recommended for any student who is interested in working in childcare, or who wished to learn more about parenting and working with young children.

Organised through Cosgrove HS; 32 students from 5 schools

Derwent Maritime Adventure

The program was based around Sailing and Seamanship and offered skill development possibilities outside the normal scope generally available to schools. The program was based at Austins Ferry Yacht Club.

Activities included:
- boating – safety and an introduction to the parts of a boat;
- rowing;
- sailing;
- capsizes – demonstration and practice;
- introduction to navigation;
- knots;
- sailing – with instructors, on a large boat and solo.

Organised through Claremont HS; 47 students from 9 schools

Emergency Services

The objectives of this program were to:
- develop community social responsibility and personal futures;
- use emergency services personnel to train students in how to respond in an emergency;
- give students opportunities/experiences that would not be available to them otherwise;

Course content:
- disaster management/risk assessment;
- Marine and Safety Tasmania session on use of flares and display;
- Fire fighting;
- Police Search and Rescue with Rotor Lift Helicopter;
- State Emergency Services session on road safety and accidents, radio usage, use of global positioning system (GPS).

Organised through Glenora District HS; 69 students from 9 schools

Farm/Agriculture

The program covered general farm maintenance, animal husbandry and landscaping. It was a practical hands-on experience of a working farm. Viticulture was a new inclusion into the program and it is hoped it will extend the range of experiences available to the students and give them an introduction to an industry which is predicted to grow by a factor of 10 in our local area.

Organised through Bridgewater HS; 85 students from 9 schools

Fabrication

Students involved in this course were led through a ten week program designed to provide skills necessary to competently undertake basic carpentry repairs and house maintenance tasks.

Participants were initially involved in the design and construction of a storage facility for use in the Cosgrove Centre Playgroup.
Market Garden project. This shed was constructed as a prefabricated unit using accepted building construction techniques and fastened together on site. Following this project (time permitting) students were invited to suggest further projects in consultation with the team leaders while considering their particular interest and skill development needs.

Students undertaking this course acquired skills in the following areas:
- Basic building construction techniques;
- Appropriate building material selection and use;
- Power and hand tool purchase and maintenance;
- Basic building design and drawing techniques.

Organised through Cosgrove HS; 12 students from 5 schools

Holdens & Fords

This course encouraged the student to gain an understanding of the mechanical, electrical and body work aspects of motor vehicles. This involved the identification, operation, fault finding and maintenance procedures of the various components, through project and problem-based activities. The students were exposed to a range of systems and the course provided significant applied science content in areas like electronics, hydraulics and materials.

The course included a girls only group.

Organised through Rosetta HS; 15 students from 5 schools

Horticulture *

Students were selected by participating schools to act as student leaders for the program. These students then participated in an introductory session at the Botanical Gardens and then Rosetta High School for a planning and design session.

The students then spent three days designing and producing a completed horticulture project at Rosetta High School. Schools that sent students to the planning and design session and then Rosetta were then able to design and implement projects at their own schools. The workshop leader worked on the designs with the student leaders in their individual schools at times negotiated with the Principal of the school.

A final session was held at Rosetta High after the projects had been completed to compare projects and review outcomes.

Organised through Rosetta HS; 15 students from 5 schools

Jokers in the Pack *

The students studied various forms of comedy performance and comedy writing with the aim of preparing and performing their own stand up comedy routine in front of an audience for three minutes.

Studies included voice and performance, writing for comedy, improvisation, show and workshop, working on routines and rehearsal and test performance. At the conclusion of the workshop students performed their routines in the Hobart heat of the National Class Clowns competition. Successful students then progressed to the State Final.

This was a one week block.

Organised through Bothwell DHS; 13 students from 5 schools

Junior Fire Brigade *

Objectives:
- develop community/social responsibility;
- to take keen students to a much greater depth than the Emergency Services course allows;
- encourage students interested in a career with the TFS or Rural Volunteer Brigades;
- rural students and their communities see successful educational programs attracting city students.

Content: Introduction to the Fire Service:
- Standards of safety;
- Hydrants/Standpipes;
- Hose care/maintenance and handling;
- Branches/Hose fittings;
- Small gear;
- Fire extinguishers;
- Ropes, lines and knots;
- Radio procedures;
- Ladders;
- Map reading.

For one day a week for eight weeks.

Organised through Glenora DHS; 20 students from 7 schools

Multimedia

This program provided the opportunity for students to study a range of multimedia applications including: computer animation, movie making and graphic art. In 2003 the Real Learning/Real Futures Multi Media students won awards for animated video clips in Graphics and completed a short movie. Multi Media is an emerging industry in Tasmania with many exciting opportunities opening up. The program catered for artistic students with an interest in computers but with the film making (video clips) and music components that have a great deal of appeal across the board.

Organised through Rosetta HS; 26 students from 5 schools

Natural Health Care

The aims and objectives of the project were:
- to address issues of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-management and presentation skills;
- to provide intrinsic skills inherent for workers in the Community Services and Health industry and Natural Therapies such as personal fitness, stress-management and coping strategies, resilience, self-care and maintenance of health and well-being;
- to provide information on career pathways into Community Services and Health industry (eg Aged
Care, Child Care, Youth Work and Health Promotion) and in Natural Therapies through visits to Island Health College, TAFE College and the clinics of practicing therapists.

The activities used to achieve this were:
- Specific activities include yoga, tai chi, relaxation techniques, skin care and making simple products, foot baths and foot massage.

Organised through Derwent Support Services;
81 students from 6 schools

Riverkeeper
Students were selected for the program on the basis of interest in boating and water activities. They worked cooperatively and participated in authentic learning activities that allowed opportunities for them to develop their water and boating skills. Activities were practically based and focused on the ecosystems of rivers and wetlands.

Course content:
- environmental sustainability;
- water-front cleanup;
- snorkelling, hip-wader instruction, safety at sea – delivered at pool;
- water safety;
- water health studies;
- training for completion of junior power boat licence.

Organised through Derwent Support Services;
114 students from 9 schools

Robotics
Introduction to Robotics was designed to provide a hands-on experience of robotics. Students learnt how to design and build their own robots using LEGO and to program them using the ROBOLAB software. Along the way they undertook a series of challenges, including building robots to play robotic soccer and entering as a team in the statewide RoboCup Junior competition. After an introductory one-week block, this project ran one day a week for two terms.

Organised through New Norfolk HS;
31 students from 6 schools

So, in summary, these projects in 2004 have been as shown in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquaculture</td>
<td>2-day block</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatics Week</td>
<td>5-day block</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklaying</td>
<td>3 x 1 day</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Garden</td>
<td>8 x half-days (afternoons)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Playgroup</td>
<td>6-8 x half days (mornings)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derwent Maritime Adventure</td>
<td>5-day block</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Services</td>
<td>5-day block</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>6 weeks x 1 day</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrication</td>
<td>6 weeks + x half day</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holdens and Fords</td>
<td>10 weeks x 1 day</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>5 weeks x 1 day + extra flexible time</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokers in the Pack</td>
<td>5-day block</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Fire Brigade</td>
<td>8 weeks x 1 day</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia</td>
<td>10 weeks x 1 day</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Therapies</td>
<td>2-day block</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverkeepers</td>
<td>3 x 2-day blocks</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robotics</td>
<td>Intro 5-day block + 1 day per term for 2 terms</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Program has maintained records of the enrolments within these activities by school, and by ‘at risk’ designation. This enables an examination of the activities by nature of enrolments.

Some activities (Bricklaying and Holdens & Fords in particular, but also the Aquaculture Week and the Community Garden to a lesser degree) attracted higher numbers of ‘at risk’ students, while others (Aquaculture, Fabrication, Jokers in the Pack, Robotics and Community Playgroup) attracted substantially lower than average numbers of ‘at risk’ students. This Review was not able to determine reasons for this from students; it is something that should be the subject of further monitoring and enquiry within schools.

Further, very different access patterns emerged between District High Schools and High Schools. Overall, 27% of the placements were taken by designated ‘at risk’ students; in District High Schools, this was 31% of placements, and in High Schools it was 25%.

The concentration of designated ‘at risk’ students in some activities is more pronounced for District High Schools than for High Schools, and the overall spread of activities accessed by students from District High Schools is much smaller than for High Schools. The following seven activities were accessed by few or no students from District High Schools: Aquaculture, Community Gardening *, Community Playgroup *, Fabrication *, Horticulture, Multimedia and Robotics.

The organisational structures of these activities (usually a short half-day session once a week) may mean that District High Schools and their students are unable to take part in them – particularly where the journey involved to get to and to return from the activity is substantially longer than the activity’s duration. In these cases, schools are unwilling to have their students take part. Activities with this structure are marked above with an asterisk.

The RL/RF Executive Officer also notes specific issues with these courses:

- **Aquaculture** – three students from Glenora are already registered for the second course which is happening late November/early December. They bartered away positions on course 1 in order to send three students together; this helps with the bus to collect a reasonable group from Glenora once rather than possibly one single student alone. I had also assumed that I would give preferences this time to other District High Schools given that the bus will be travelling to Glenora on its way to Oatlands.

- **Robotics and Multi Media** are full day rather than half day courses. I believe the issue with these two in particular is more a case of the names of the project and a lack of understanding by students about what they are offering. Our visit to Oatlands with the Multimedia students to show what happened in the project was our first foray into addressing these issues, and from all accounts was a useful exercise. I have also had discussions re Robotics and the possibility of showcasing them by school visits.

- **Re: Horticulture.** Initially we had six students from Oatlands who were going to attend this course; however a clash with their school camp week meant they had to miss the important introductory session so, after discussions with the workshop leader, we decided they would pull out for this year but that Oatlands would definitely participate in this activity next year.

3. Development of The eLearning Network

In August 2004, the schools in the Network agreed in principle to the establishment of an eLearning Network that will link them in delivering

- a common on-line curriculum;
- a virtual learning environment for students and teachers;
- a virtual workplace for teachers.

This is projected to guarantee students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week access to flexible learning, with specific programs in the areas of Gifted and Talented Education, Transition, On-line Literacy and Numeracy, Leadership and On-line Project Based Learning. This will mean that students are able to continue learning through these programs even when they’re not at school. It will also enable processes to be established for the use of a digital portfolio in assessment and reporting on and by students of all learning activities across several sites within the Network.

A sub-group of four of the schools within the Network have already committed to the purchase of the Studywiz ‘learning delivery system’ that will ‘create, monitor and manage’ individual learning plans, assignments, resources, tests and assessments and digital portfolios. This group will be part of a pilot to be evaluated in 2005. It has been suggested that other schools in the Network will benefit from this process as they all would then be in a position to assess its relevance to their needs and to determine their own level of commitment and involvement over time. It is believed that, seeing this eLearning Network in action, the other schools will ‘buy in’ to it during 2005.

Such an approach is in line with Departmental plans to support clusters in developing and sharing resources. It is seen to be spreading capacity for online learning across clusters. The RL/RF Network is one of the more advanced on-line initiatives in the state.
In 2004, an eLearning Network Plan has been developed, with project leaders identified for all the areas (see below). Content development and training has begun, with the eLearning Network to commence in February 2005 and progressively develop in complexity.

The specific project areas include (as well as those associated with Management, Partnerships, Professional Learning and Online Design and Delivery):

**Online Courses:** a rich and diverse eLearning curriculum … available to students of the cluster. These courses will include full year programs related to student personal pathways in particular areas and will also provide eLearning experiences of shorter duration.

**Horizons:** enhance skills of students particularly in schools with small cohorts of students of advanced capability. The project will provide opportunities for these students to be part of an online community of learners with similar needs. The project will be undertaken with three focus areas: literacy, numeracy, and special projects. It will involve significant project based learning and the use of multimedia.

**Gifted and Talented:** provide online extension programs and online resources for gifted children in the cluster. The project will be inclusive. It will create online communities of like minded children and provide extension programs for them.

**Online Literacy and Numeracy:** creates an online presence and online learning experiences to support literacy and numeracy programs in the cluster. It includes an emphasis on the use of multimedia, online literacy and numeracy challenges, intervention programs and authentic workplace investigations into literacy and numeracy requirements.

**Student Leadership:** develop and enhance the leadership skills of students and provide online forums and opportunities enabling student leaders to work collaboratively and reflect on leadership in relation to authentic issues. Mentor relationships will be fostered.

**Online Transition:** provide Year 10 students with greater ownership of their future pathway options, at an earlier stage. The program provides the opportunity to develop connections with peers and staff at Claremont College. By developing an ongoing communication channel ‘online’ throughout the year, Grade 10 students will have a greater focus for orientation visits, and will have ongoing opportunities to address fears and concerns about their transition to Year 11/12. The program will also provide an authentic purpose for developing electronic communication skills.

**Online Project Based Learning (PBL):** support and extend the existing PBL through the utilisation of eLearning approaches and the creation and maintenance of an online web presence for each of the PBL projects.

In addition, a project team is developing the digital portfolio concept, with several different models being piloted and evaluated. It is seen to facilitate assessment activities that align with the Essential Learnings.

**INTEGRATING ELEARNING AND PROJECT BASED LEARNING (PBL)**

If each of the Project Based Learning areas is able to use the eLearning Network to enhance and extend their work, there will be possibilities of taking educational activities to students rather than students to activities. A Principal notes: "we know that … it’s not about moving kids to the resources, but about moving the resources to the kids. That’s the world of the future, but RL/RF does it the other way round.”

It is proposed that e-Learning and PBL will also be integrated particularly through the use of digital portfolios. At the moment, with students attending up to 17 activities throughout the Network, recording of what students have done and assessment of outcomes tends to be fragmented. Some teachers indicate that they receive little information about student achievements; this becomes a critical issue when it comes to reporting on students’ outcomes, and can also serve to relegate RL/RF activities to ‘second rate’ in comparison to other areas where assessments exist.

It is envisaged that the digital portfolios will enable students and teachers to ‘capture’ and record activities, achievements and outcomes in a variety of ways. Students will be encouraged to think about what they have done and what they might add to their portfolios in order to demonstrate this. The portability of these portfolios within the Network also means that information can be added from different projects, and then accumulated and analysed at times of reporting.

Thus eLearning will be used to enhance project based learning; there is no expectation that students will be ‘online’ all the time, but may use eLearning for reflection, linking with industry people and mentors, following up issues, asking questions and so on.

**MONITORING OF ELEARNING CONCERNS**

The Network intends to use eLearning to directly address social justice issues within the area: "Recent studies indicate the take up of technology in financially low socio-economic and/or geographically isolated areas is significantly lower than in advantaged urban situations. All Derwent schools fall into one or both of these disadvantaged categories. Supporting students via on-line learning can [contribute to] overcoming these poverty-based technological disadvantages.”

However, members of the Network are also cautious about the difficulties they face in ensuring that those students most at need, do gain access to learning through these means. Will, for example, the financially poorest students be able to gain access to hardware? Will students who have traditionally been ‘turned off’ learning, be motivated to pursue learning in this way? One Principal also notes: "It will take some time to bed down,
because you’re imposing that on kids who have no idea of how to use a Learning Management System. The question is whether those kids who are most at risk will ever access it."

“You can connect with some students,” says an on-line learning consultant, “but the idea that you can give a seriously disengaged student a computer (and the problem will be solved)… it doesn’t necessarily work.”

It is also noted within the proposal group that “some kids respond to online learning, but others don’t … it is simply another quiver in our bow. It’s an additional tool that schools can use.”

There is a need to continue to monitor the implementation and practice of the Network.

One of the strengths of the Project Based Learning activities is the social mix of students from different schools, as they physically meet and work together in community locations. If eLearning were to seek to replace this aspect, much of the excitement and commitment may be lost. But online learning also offers other possibilities for students to work within a team: “You’ve got a student and you’ve got a teacher … but you’ve also got to have a mentor – someone reminding the kid that they’re expected to have something ready today, or to ask ‘what do you mean by that?’ In a regular classroom, you just have a teacher and a student. The supportive environment is crucial there – and it’s also critical online.”

4. WORK/ENTERPRISE

The third projected area of RL/RF is around Work/Enterprise Education. The Program wrote: “this project aims to broaden the opportunities students have to access real life experiences in the world of work, business, enterprise and community. These opportunities will be facilitated through the establishment of links and partnerships with key community organisations (eg the Beacon Foundation, Red Cross, local councils). These opportunities will better prepare students for entry into VET programs at the college level and the workforce.”

The following events and workshops have taken place:
- Enterprise Workshop;
- Careers Expo;
- Exposure to careers
- Exploration of VET Programs;
- Manufacturing Industries Day.

The Program is also developing an on-line career action planning process that all Network schools will be able to access using the digital portfolio aspect of the eLearning Network. The digital portfolio will provide a work space for students to complete their career and work education studies using a variety of media and will provide a permanent and portable record that can be retained and revisited at any time.

The career action plan will be part of each student’s individual educational plan, and will include the following components:
- Personal and educational history;
- Enquiry regarding career options;
- Reflections on work experiences and investigations; and
- Pathway planning.

Students will start their career planning process in Grade 8 and continue to upgrade their plans (which will be ‘captured’ and organised in their digital portfolio) through a series of interviews and portfolio presentations through Grades 9 and 10. They will be required to present their career action plan to a panel (someone from their chosen field, a parent, peers and a member of staff) for evaluation, guidance and counselling.
Program Structural Issues

ESSENTIAL LEARNINGS FOR ALL (ATELIER REPORT)

In June 2004, the report of a Review of Services for Students with Special and/or Additional Educational Needs (by Atelier Learning Solutions) under the title Essential Learnings for All, was presented and accepted by the Tasmanian Department of Education. The report recommended, inter alia, the adoption of a model that replaces Districts and District support structures by larger Branches and ‘locally organised communities of schools’ or clusters. These proposals were accepted.

The details of these clusters, in most cases involving a High School and its surrounding Primary Schools, or a group of District High Schools and Primary Schools, took some time to arrange and only became known in October 2004.

The Review seemed to acknowledge the work of groups such as the RL/RF Network:

“The Review understands that in a number of instances, principals, on their own volition, have come together to respond to need in their local community and to share resources. Although largely nascent, these local arrangements have great potential to underpin the quality of service provision for all students…. It is now timely to give structural expression to the important role many principals already play in establishing and sustaining supportive school communities… The role (of clusters) would include ensuring the inclusiveness of the culture of the community of schools, broadening the concept of school learning to incorporate, under the auspices of each school, authentic learning opportunities outside the classroom and indeed the boundaries of the school.” (page 72; emphasis not in the original)

However, the new clusters cut across the existing District arrangements, and the nine schools found themselves in four different clusters, in some cases, linked with other District High Schools that had not been members of the RL/RF Program.

The impact of these changes was to put a hold on RL/RF planning for 2005. The future structure was only resolved in October 2004 when cluster structures became known, and a formal commitment was made by the Principals of the existing schools to continue the RL/RF Program in 2005.

During 2004, two major structural changes have had an impact on the Program and its work. The Program has ‘survived’ both these changes, but they have each provided serious challenges to the operations of RL/RF.

YOUTH LEARNING OFFICER POSITION

Youth Learning Officer (YLO) positions were created in each of the six Tasmanian Department of Education Regions in 2003-4 to support young people in their transition from Grade 10 to further education, training or employment. The implementation model described them as “typically working with young people aged 15-19 who are disengaged from school or who are at risk of disengaging or not continuing in education, training and/or employment at the end of Year 10”.

The Derwent District, with the agreement of the Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training (OPCET) used the YLO position to support the development of the RL/RF Program in 2003-4. Effectively the Executive Officer of the Program, she played an essential core role in ensuring both that the Project Based Learning activities happened, and also in convening Program initiatives such as teacher meetings, formalisation of objectives, planning submissions and so on.

Early in 2004, the role of the YLOs was defined by the Department of Education as working intensively with a specific case load of 50 Year 10 students through the transition from Grade 10 to develop a pathway and transition plan. This meant the YLO could potentially not be used for RL/RF Program support but the current Executive Officer continued in her position during 2004, with funding being found internally within the Network. There is a commitment from the Network to maintain this position in 2005 as part of the overall Program funding package, but the longer-term future remains uncertain.
In 2003, the Program adopted the following statement to define its Project Based Learning directions:

The Real Learning/Real Futures Project offers a range of programs at school sites across the Derwent District. They are designed to improve the learning outcomes for all students but in particular for those students at risk of disengaging from education, training and/or employment. Programs allow broader student options and focus on making the curriculum more interesting, more relevant and more meaningful. In this way all students benefit and our students 'at-risk' have a much better provision that does not isolate them from the mainstream.

Project Goals:

• increased student engagement with the curriculum;
• increased student retention to completion of Year 12;
• increased student attendance;
• reduced suspension levels;
• extended curriculum offerings that align with the Essential Learnings;
• improved student learning outcomes.

Project Strategies:

• work co-operatively and in partnership with District schools to extend curriculum offerings;
• provide students and teachers in Derwent District schools with opportunities to work together;
• establish a variety of programs and interventions to meet the learning needs of students at-risk of disengaging from education, training and/or employment;
• programs reflect student diversity and include some students at-risk;
• build partnerships with other agencies and services to create an effective, seamless student support network;
• assist schools to embed programs in local context where appropriate;
• provide professional learning and teacher networking to extend the skills of staff working with students at risk.

1. RL/RF GOALS

Overall, it was difficult for respondents to point to 'hard evidence' around these issues. In looking at overall information about attendance and suspensions and so on, another issue emerged: definitions and criteria have changed over the last few years and consistent comparisons are difficult.

Further, RL/RF is one of several programs operating with relevance to these areas, and it is highly difficult (and perhaps impossible) to attribute causality (or lack of causality) to one specific program from the data available.

Another school links retention to Program attendance, but implies that common factors influence both: "The students who failed to attend RL/RF activities failed to complete Grade 10, are in trouble with the law, and have chosen to drop out. Those students who were heavily involved in RL/RF activities stayed and completed Grade 10 and even came to the Graduation Dinner... All 'at risk' students except two completed Grade 10 and are either going to TAFE or College or apprenticeship.*

A survey by the Bridgewater Urban Renewal Program (BURP) into positive factors keeping students at school, found that 80 percent of students named RL/RF programs.
**Increased student attendance**

Again, there does not appear to be any accumulated data within these specific schools that shows useful trends. Information from the Department is available about ‘absentee rates’ for 2003 and this is disaggregated by District, showing an overall rate of 9.61 percent (3.51 percent illness; 6.10 percent not associated with illness). This is the highest of all districts and the contrast is mainly in the ‘not illness’ area; a similar result was found in 2002.

Absentee rates increase steadily through the secondary years in High Schools, but there is not such a strong rise within District High Schools. Overall, there was a small decrease in absentee rates from 2002 to 2003.

It was suggested in one school that if one tracked attendance of some individual ‘at risk’ students, this would show dramatically increased attendance during times of RL/RF involvement (ie even on days during this time when the specific project didn’t operate), but then (normally) decreased attendance at other times. For some ‘at risk’ students, notes a Principal, “if they’re attending RL/RF, they’re increasing their attendance … because they’ve been coming so little.”

This is supported through several anecdotes:

*Our students usually turn up except for illness and maybe if they are suspended. Usually students are keen to get there and be involved.*

Students who have irregular attendance are coming to school for these programs but I have insufficient evidence that their attendance as a whole has improved.

*We have seen improved attendance from students who value the program and are therefore prepared to turn up on time to participate.*

There is increased attendance at RL/RF activities and a decrease at school when RL/RF isn’t on, but some students actually increased their attendance overall, especially Grade 10s towards the end of the year, when other activities were on as well. Grade 9 students who participated in RL/RF have increased their attendance as they want to be involved in 2005. Maybe it’s carrot and stick.

A sample of 27 identified ‘at risk’ students was drawn (three from each of the nine schools) and their attendance records analysed. While there is some concern with incomplete data, analysis of this data does allow us to indicate two major conclusions. Several ‘at risk’ students do show substantial improvements in attendance and suspension during and following participation in RL/RF activities (while some others also show little change). Secondly, it will be extremely valuable to continue to collect and analyse data within schools in 2005.

**Reduced suspension levels (and other punitive behaviour management interventions)**

The accumulated suspension and exclusion rates for the District throw little light on what is happening in RL/RF schools, and there does not seem to be any information held and analysed on a school-by-school basis.

One school notes: “We’re not sure that we’ve had any huge impact through RL/RF, though we have with (other similar programs). The issues are still there in Grade 8 – in fact suspensions are slightly up there.”

Another said: “Suspension rates have normalised within this group. The fact that students attended RL/RF even when suspended made them think collaboratively about things when they returned … Some of these students thrived on the individual/small group attention which kept them focused and challenged their behaviours outside the classroom with positive responses. It involved one to one tuition, which is a real life apprenticeship situation. All students actually benefited from being involved.”

The Program has only been in operation for two years and that significant cultural changes will be needed if suspension and related rates are to change. As one respondent noted: “We need a longer time frame to quantify outcomes.”

The following table provides some information about suspension rates in 2002 and 2003:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>Proportion 2002</th>
<th>Proportion 2003</th>
<th>Rate per 100 students 2002</th>
<th>Rate per 100 students 2003</th>
<th>Length – days 2002</th>
<th>Length – days 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>7.41</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1225</td>
<td>1567</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>14.95</td>
<td>19.20</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>9.60</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>4741</td>
<td>5916</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was noted that the increase in suspensions in 2003 was a consequence of an Auditor-General’s Report into suspension and exclusion. Many schools increased the formality and reporting of such suspensions that led to apparent increases in rates. The Derwent District (D) continued to have suspension rates significantly above the state average through this period (“Our base line was a lot higher,” says one Principal, “because we were already calling it like it is”), and this increased in 2003 compared with 2002 (though the length of suspensions dropped slightly). The rate of increase of suspensions in the District (28.4% increase) was around the state average (25.6% increase – other District increases ranged from 8.9% to 35.2%).

In looking at the suspension data to 31 July 2004, it has been noted by the Department that rates of suspension in the Derwent District were similar to, though slightly lower than, those for the similar period in 2003. The District Superintendent also noted that there were 220 notifications to him of suspensions for a third time (in a year) in 2003 and that this had dropped to 166 in 2004.

When we look at other data becoming available for the three years 2002-2003-2004, we can notice some slightly stronger patterns. This information is for exclusions – the step beyond suspension (numbers of students excluded from school beyond the 10-day suspension period):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3 (.04%)</td>
<td>1 (.01%)</td>
<td>0 (.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>3 (.03%)</td>
<td>17 (.19%)</td>
<td>11 (.12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>14 (.13%)</td>
<td>27 (.27%)</td>
<td>25 (.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>21 (.23%)</td>
<td>29 (.33%)</td>
<td>18 (.21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>36 (.17%)</td>
<td>41 (.19%)</td>
<td>59 (.28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>10 (.07%)</td>
<td>7 (.05%)</td>
<td>5 (.04%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>87 (.12%)</td>
<td>122 (.17%)</td>
<td>118 (.17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The District dropped significantly in these rates in 2004 and, while still substantially above the state average, is no longer the leader in terms of the rate of exclusion.

b) Student learning:

**Increased student engagement with the curriculum**

All the project leaders interviewed note a high level of student engagement with the curriculum within RL/RF. They tell of students attending regularly, maintaining focus and interest, and behaving appropriately.

“We have had great success with an all girls class in Term 1 where a majority of the girls were upset that they could not come all year rather than just for the 10 weeks”; “Very effective at engaging ‘at risk’ students – sense of achievement. No nonsense approach to lesson delivery”; “Jokers in the Pack” really caters for those ‘smart arse’ kids in the class”; “Excellent mix of kids – all keen and eager to be there”; “Students keep asking to be part of the program.”

Some school-based personnel (eg grade coordinators) note: “Engagement is more difficult to show. Certainly they (at risk’ students) are very engaged with RL/RF but it’s hard to show any flow-over into other subject areas.”

On the other hand, one Grade Coordinator points to the interaction of the activity and the way it is approached to the question of engagement: “I also suspect the way some of these courses are run might not engage our ‘at risk’ students anyway… I heard ‘word of mouth’ through other sources that the teacher running one activity was having a behavioural problem with several of our students. Now I know these were not high level behaviourally difficult students, and therefore feel that the staff running or offering programs need to be quite clear about the purpose of the programs, and ensure that they accommodate students appropriately. They are not meant to be a repeat of what they already experience in regular class programs. Of course some staff managed students really well eg (one project) guy was brilliant with our Grade 10 boys who can be ‘lads’. The message here might be that we need to establish quite clearly the types of management skills that staff need to utilise.”

**Improved student learning outcomes**

Improved learning outcomes may be consequent on issues such as engagement. Their recognition also depends both on further development of the formalisation of these learning goals (“The learning outcomes will be a lot easier when it is all part of Essential Learnings.”) and on the development of a structure to collect assessments and feed these back to the schools. It will be noted later that this is an area that needs further work.

One school formally notes: “Certainly we’ve got improved learning outcomes and increased student engagement. We’ll be better able to judge that from here on because everything’s getting assessed against calibrated outcomes.”

But at the moment, evaluation of these outcomes relies again on anecdotes.
c) Curriculum

Extended/broadened curriculum offerings that align with the Essential Learnings

This goal sits apart from the others in that it addresses a goal for organisational (rather than student) outcomes.

There has been a major continuing initiative within the RL/RF Program in 2004 to align and document the various curriculum offerings with the Essential Learnings. Project Coordinators continue to work with District support consultants to write statements of goals, objectives and assessment statements.

There is still however concerns about the mix of activities offered within RL/RF and whether all will align with the Essential Learnings. However, this goal provides a framework for decisions about what projects to seek, develop or accept. A Principal says: “We’ve got to be clever about constructing the programs … It was built around what people wanted to do rather than about what kids needed. You’ve got to find a half-way point between what kids want and need, and what staff can provide.”

2. RL/RF STRATEGIES

The proposed strategies are grouped into two sets, though many of the comments here are further developed in the next section looking at the 2003 recommendations:

a) strategies within individual schools:

Establish a variety of projects and interventions to meet the learning needs of students at risk of disengaging from education, training and/or employment

Through RL/RF, 17 different workshops were offered in 2004 as resource to schools to support their school programs for both mainstream and at risk students. The nature of the projects is also very diverse, with a variety of styles and content, while united by being ‘hands-on’ and ‘applied’:

“I value the program as it is hands on, real life situations where the student is faced with problem/project learning situations.”

Projects reflect student diversity and include some students at risk

As noted in the earlier tables, approximately 45% of the students in the total cohort have participated in an RL/RF activity in 2004 and 27% of the places available went to ‘at risk’ students. This ‘at risk’ percentage varied from school to school (and was also influenced by schools’ definition of ‘at risk’) – from about 11% to 54%. This is also discussed later in response to 2003 recommendations.

Assist schools to embed Projects in local context where appropriate

Respondents point to several examples of projects being responsive to and linked with local contexts: “Child care centre, Community Garden”, “Parents and children who attend playgroup are from local community”, “Very much embedded in local context eg Farm”, “Bricklaying community projects (seats, BBQs) where possible.”
b) strategies between schools

Schools work cooperatively and in partnership with the District to extend curriculum offerings

The nature of the organisational structure changed during 2004, however the cooperative principles of this strategy continue. The same group of schools (with two more invited to join) is now committed to continuing their collaborative work in 2005. Respondents have said that: “cooperation is the most obvious and impressive feature of the whole Program.”

Provide students and teachers in the District with opportunities to work together

The cooperation between schools has practical outcomes for both students and teachers. The projects draw students from schools across the network and there have been many opportunities for teachers to meet and work together:

- Coordinator, workshop leaders and timetablers meetings;
- IT personnel and eLearning Network planning and implementation meetings;
- Program workshops.

There are suggestions for further developments in this area: “We would need to have all teachers involved in the program (better informed) so that they know what students are doing. Perhaps we need a taster day.” “Perhaps we all need a taster day and then we would have more input, more opportunities and more commitment from the teachers.”

Build partnerships with other agencies and services to create an effective, seamless student support network

The Program also works outside the schools to build partnerships with other agencies. These include Glenorchy Youth Service Information Forum, City of Glenorchy Workshop to explore youth issues for the review of the Glenorchy Community Plan, Centrelink Exposure 2004 and Commissioner for Children’s International Youth Day celebrations.

While important, it is unclear whether these links are focused on the provision of a ‘seamless support network’ – such an objective would seem to involve a larger local plan within which RL/RF would play a role.

Provide professional learning and teacher networking to extend the skills of staff working with students at risk

The Program has provided opportunities in 2004, particularly around the Essential Learnings and around the eLearning Plan, for both training and networking of staff. However, this is still identified as an important area to be addressed, with some staff indicating the importance of further professional development, including for non-teaching staff, about processes specifically for relating to and engaging ‘students at risk’. In addition, the move towards aligning projects with the Essential Learnings and the focus on assessment in line with this, will require a higher degree of understanding by all staff.

There are important un-met needs identified here.
Responses to 2003 Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1A:

“The Program needs to have certainty of support and funding (and) ... seek a commitment of funding for a minimum period of 3 years ...”

We asked:
What has been sought?
What Departmental or other general commitments of support have been provided?

Action:
In some ways, the funding position of RL/RF overall would appear more uncertain at the end of 2004 as the potential of on-going core funding at a District level has been overtaken by Departmental restructuring.

Towards the end of 2004, there was an explicit commitment from the Principals of the schools in the RL/RF Network to continue the funding of projects and of the Network collaboration (including the Program Coordinator). As had previously been organised and allocated for 2003 and 2004, funding for projects will be accumulated from the MARSSS (Managing and Retaining Secondary Students at Risk Program) provisions to the schools (1.8 FTE or around $165,000) in 2005. In addition, the Network schools will meet the salary of the Program Coordinator in 2005 with the cost per school based on Grade 9-10 cohort numbers. In order to meet both project costs and the salary, costs to schools will be around $224 per Year 9/10 student.

In the longer term, the Network has decided to pursue becoming an established corporate entity and to attract specific sponsorship and funding from diverse sources to sustain its work.

One Principal notes: “It’s a really expensive program for what you get out of it. That’s not devaluing what you get out of it, (but) I still have some reservations about the cost-benefit of it. It’s a great concept. We’ve got to keep moving it around until we get something that is economically viable and educationally sound.”

In looking at the longer-term future, it is recognised that: “we’ve bought time to (build certainty of support and funding). Thereafter we’ll be using a business planning model (with) a service level agreement between the various clusters and that’s going to take a bit of time next year.” This will be the responsibility of the next Management Board, to be elected by and from the Network schools at the start of 2005.

While there has been considerable interest from various levels within the Department of Education, this has not yet resulted in systemic support except for some start-up costs associated with the eLearning Network.

The Network Principals believe that such a business model, allied with the embedding of the Program in individual schools’ curricula, provides the best option for the long-term stability of RK/RF. This means that the Program will operate across five local clusters (in 2005), with clusters committed to its economic and curriculum sustainability. It is suggested that this could provide a model for that ways in which other initiatives could operate across cluster boundaries.

The directions for support of ‘at risk’ students seems to be moving towards individual ‘pathways planning’ models (ie the Support, Advice and Mentoring (SAM) program for working with young people from low income and disadvantaged circumstances, principally out of schools) rather than towards curriculum revision, and some concern has been expressed about the loss of a specific focus on some students’ needs.

In the 2003 Report, ten recommendations were presented to the Program. In 2004, we asked about action and progress against these, as a way of illuminating the reflective ‘action research’ process adopted by the Program. These also allow us to comment on some of the trends apparent in the earlier project and student data.
RECOMMENDATION 1B:  
“... involve support for individual project operation and provision of coordination and development at a District level ...”

We asked:
What current support is being provided for project and Program operation?
What funding certainty is there for Program coordination and development?

Action:
The Derwent District has continued to play a vital role in the Program, both in terms of their coordination, support and advocacy, and also in terms of resource provision. The District has continued to provide the bus, part of its running costs, and has underwritten some project costs in order to keep school contributions lower. It has also supported the coordinator position after YLO funding finished.

However, this District level support will become irrelevant in 2005, and there is now a commitment to the Program by the partner schools to provide the equivalent funding support to that given by District Office in the previous two years.

Project funding has been supplied by the schools from the consolidated schools’ MARSSS funds or from their individual other resources eg “The school provided money that covered initial set-up funding for computer software and hardware, together with ongoing funding for costs, and entry to authentic projects.”

The various projects have continued to apply for and, in some cases, obtain specific funding for aspects of the program, including some of the infrastructure. These tend to be once-off and short-term grants. “Various applications for grants have been applied for across the project. Holdens & Fords received funds to support a girls only group from Women Tasmania. Sponsorships have been sought for the costs associated with running the bus and we have secured one three year sponsorship of $5,000 pa from Forestry Tasmania.”

Otherwise, projects are budgeted for by the schools on a year by year basis, and this has been welcomed and supported by those operating these projects.

RECOMMENDATION 2A:
“The mix of students ... should continue with specific attention paid to targeting participation by those most in need…”

We asked:
What is the current mix of students in the projects?
What evidence that those students ‘most in need’ are gaining access to projects?

Action:
The 2004 Project Based Learning projects encompassed a Grade 9 and 10 cohort of 1,112 students; 505 (45%) participated in at least one activity, with a total of 723 places (ie many students accessed the Program more than once). Of these 505 students, 135 (27% overall) were identified as ‘at risk’ and these students accessed 196 places (27% of all places).

These percentages vary from school to school, and seem to be influenced also by schools’ different definitions of ‘at risk’. However, schools identify both an understanding and the importance of the mix, and describe the population as:

“We’ve continued trying to get three students into each program, of these, two being not students termed ‘at risk’ and the other being ‘at risk’”, “Still going for a mix of ‘at risk’ and highly motivated. We are having more success with the attendance of the at risk than we did at the start though they still miss sessions from time to time”; “The demographics have changed: it was set up to deal with disaffected young people but it’s moved beyond that ... that’s good”; “The program needs a range of students so good role models are present as well as those in need. Also those in need have difficulties with commitments for a variety of reasons”; “Broad ability levels 9/10 and special needs students”; “Students with a range of abilities have been involved.”

While a target of approximately one third students ‘at risk’ has been specified, there is some concern that it’s not always been met: “I’m not sure that 30% are deemed ‘at risk’. Not many students outside school are currently involved.”

On the other hand, some project coordinators note that there are still difficulties with the ‘most at risk’ students. “Some of the more hard core kids we’d like to do the program, don’t
“In a small town community,” another school says, “(there are some) who just resist leaving the small town community… They are scared of getting out of their comfort zone.” A third school notes similarly that the ‘most at risk’ students appear less willing to participate – they are reluctant to mix with other students, and reluctant to leave the known area. But, on the other hand, a few students have been so keen to attend specific activities that they have just jumped on the bus and turned up without enrolment or permission.

While one project reports that “some just put the earphones on and waste time”, another says: “I get an e-mail saying ‘Please watch this kid’, but when they come here, it’s not exhibited because they’re in a different culture and a different group of people and they don’t conform to that image.”

**RECOMMENDATION 2B:**

“... develop and share specific school-level approaches to targeting...”

**We asked:**

- What opportunities have there been to share information about school-level targeting amongst those doing it?
- What have been the outcomes of this?

**Action:**

The intention of this recommendation in 2003 was to encourage some sharing of strategies to the difficult questions of how to ‘soft target’ students who are most at risk, while avoiding giving the program an exclusively ‘at risk’ orientation. It was suggested that approaches that had been found to be successful at individual schools should be communicated to grade coordinators and others responsible for publicity and/or selection. Two sessions were held in 2004, one in each of the first two terms. A third was planned for Term 3 but has been ‘displaced’ by organisational issues associated with the outcomes of the Atelier report.

In addition, the Executive Officer has “had many informal chats with individuals about their approaches and the approaches of other coordinators within the project and all are reasonably similar without being prescriptive. Often differences reflect school policy on issues such as suspension and attendance rather than any set policy relating to RL/RF.”

“We’ve had a couple of meetings with the whole group, but we’ve probably not got as far with that as we might have done. The meetings centred around the Essential Learnings were well received. I did promise the group a follow-up towards the end of term, but Atelier seems to have taken up most of my time. But we’ll pick that up again going into next year.”

The ongoing need for these discussions is endorsed: “Schools need to meet to discuss outcomes.”

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

“Clarify expectations about the nature of activities offered ... to have a coherent and planned mix...”

**We asked:**

What documentation exists about decisions on what activities will be offered?

**Action:**

This is recognised as an emerging and critical issue for the Program. To date, the activities offered within the Project Based Learning component have been determined by staff availability and interest. They do not necessarily match a considered structure of what students are perceived to ‘need’. In 2003, it was suggested that there were several broad categories of project ‘intentions’ including skill development, future career orientation, providing sampler/taster activities, social mixing, increasing breadth of experience, community development and so on. It was identified that it was important to maintain that mix, but that there should be a clear and conscious choice and monitoring of that mix.

Initially in 2003, and at the start of 2004 to a lesser degree, there were discussions about what activities would be offered. However, the nature of what activities are offered within RL/RF has been determined by what partner schools can offer and by enthusiasms of staff.

And in a meeting of the Principals, various reflective comments on this issue mirror the concerns: “It’s serendipity – it’s whether we’ve got skills to run things. Someone comes up with an idea… People come to us … We’ve never been all that reflective on whether or not we’re comfortable with what we’ve got… We need to be looking at gaps… We need to be writing units that are entertaining and engaging and at the same time having real learning outcomes...”
RECOMMENDATION 4:

“Each project should be asked to specify its learning and social objectives ... nature and outcomes clearer to students...”

We asked:
What documentation exists of project objectives?
What support given to projects to do this?
How has this documentation been used with students?

Action:
The Program has made a particular effort to develop clearer specification of project objectives, processes and assessment in line with the Essential Learnings during 2004. There have been at least two workshops with project leaders to work with consultants on this documentation. “The workshop in Term 2 aimed to have project workshop leaders address and write up their project in terms of the ELs, therefore specifying their learning and social objectives in a common and coherent format. Work has been supported by the two ELs consultants for the District and at this stage work is still continuing to have all written materials to the Project Coordinator for the next stage which includes certification of the courses for the ELs.”

RECOMMENDATION 5:

“... develop increased opportunities for authentic learning ... each activity should be supported to develop outcomes that enable all students to have an impact on their communities beyond the classroom.”

We asked:
What documentation exists about authentic learning within projects?
What has changed?
What support and/or opportunities provided to projects to develop this?

Action:
Some concern was expressed in the initial Report that there was considerable variation between and within projects around the espoused ideals of ‘authenticity’. It was interesting to note that the nature of the discussions indicates a more advanced understanding of the notion of ‘authentic learning’ and that efforts are being made to move the experiences within projects from a sole focus on ‘taking part’ or on ‘skills’ to also include achievement of outcomes that ‘have an impact on communities beyond the classroom’. The Program Executive Officer notes: “All projects have been encouraged to provide authentic learning opportunities and most have moved to incorporate this more in their activities in 2004. For example, Bricklaying now builds structures that remain, such as BBQ’s, outdoor shelters etc; Multimedia has made a documentary on the RL/RF project; Horticulture has created new garden areas for Rosetta HS; and the playgroup continues to provide a wonderful resource for the Glenorchy community.”

One project leader described how “three students presented information regarding RL/RF and multimedia at various expos” while another identified “practical, hands-on ability that may lead to a career; instilling pride in workmanship and a sense of achievement in providing something for the community.”

The Community Playgroup organiser talked of the value of the authenticity of the experience in assessing the Program’s effectivenes, but also pointed to some of the pre-requisites to maximise this authenticity: “Overall I have found the RL/RF program quite effective. Students from six local high schools have been involved, with six students attending for a six week block at a time. Providing an opportunity for students to engage with children in a practical playgroup setting has hopefully helped them in gaining a better understanding of the issues involved in child care/child work. Since most of the students this year have been Child Studies students, I could assume a certain degree of theoretical knowledge on their part, which has made planning for their time here easier. However, it would be advantageous for a greater degree of collaboration with their teachers in order for them to plan activities for the children before arriving to the playgroup.”

Others recognised the need for continued work in this area but also identified barriers to its achievement: “Opportunities but no financial support/relief. Accreditation procedures need to be inclusive of their overall results/outcomes” and “There is an expectation that program providers will have considered this. Time is always the problem. Particular time must be set aside for this in the program.”
**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

"Some form of common certification ... should be developed... needs to have appropriate parity with other learning activities..."

We asked:
- What certification currently exists?
- What moves to develop common certification?
- What responses?

Action:
The Executive Officer notes whole Program progress: "we have Certificates of Participation and statements about each project for schools to use when reporting home to parents with students’ other reports. The Essential Learnings work within the projects is aimed at providing a recognisable certification across RL/RF for students to record against their secondary schooling outcomes."

However at the moment, the certification is at the level of "individual program certificates of attendance" rather than of achievement. The existence of a certificate is strongly supported: "Yes, a certificate is definitely needed. It would clarify expectations and save time." And another respondent notes: "Certification needs credibility for other staff." However it is noted that: "every school in Tasmania has got this issue because the TCE has disappeared. It is not so much a problem centred around RL/RF – it’s a problem with what we’ll do."

**RECOMMENDATION 7A:**

"Each school ... to develop plans for the location of RL/RF within its curriculum offerings to recognise it as part of ... the curriculum"

We asked:
- What evidence exists of such plans?
- What is the current state in each school of recognition as part of the curriculum rather than as an 'extra'?
- How are schools doing this?

Action:
This area continues to be identified as a crucial aspect of the Program: whether RL/RF is integrated with the rest of the curriculum or is operating as a 'bolt-on’. "That has been one of the biggest concerns of people outside the group."

The overall impression is that the Program is perceived internally as more in line with overall curriculum offerings and structures, or that curriculum approaches are changing (under the influence of the Essential Learnings) to directions more consistent with the RL/RF approaches.

"We’ve embedded all of those programs through Make It Work and Make It Real. Because each student will have an Individual Learning Plan in 2005, (and) how they’re involved in RL/RF will simply be a negotiated part of their total set of offerings. Where it’s an ‘add-on’, it doesn’t have the sophistication of our model. It offers us a set of options that otherwise those students wouldn’t have."

However, it is also worth noting that there are wider implications involved with RL/RF’s placement in schools’ curricula. These relate to at least three issues raised by one Grade Coordinator:

- the appropriate year level for such a program;
- the similarity of activities to others operating within the school, as RL/RF becomes ‘normalised’;
- the competing of RL/RF with a rich range of other activities in some schools.

"I have been the Grade Coordinator for the same group of students since 2002. I know this group of students extensively. When these students were in Grade 8, it became quite evident which students were emerging as 'at risk'. We kept saying, opportunities next year will help provide/cater for them, eg our own Make It Work program, as well as the RL/RF offerings. I have watched very carefully the last two years, and it is my perception that we lost those students back in 2002 when they were in Grade 8, and in Grade 9 they did not show much interest in the RL/RF program because of their well-established behaviours etc.

"Also, I suspect our Make It Work program caters extremely well for these students, and they will often say, 'I don't want to do that RL/RF program because we've already done something similar as part of Make It Work'. Of our 'at risk' students who were not part of Make It Work, some have dropped out of school and others have rarely wanted to be involved in RL/RF. I have concluded the RL/RF program was too late for many of my 'at risk' students. Whilst we can address this at our school (and I am already working towards that) I rather suspect that, in answer to the question about 'is there any evidence of benefit from the program?', it is too late. Most of my students who did participate, said they wanted to for 'graduation points', not because they really wanted to do that particular course. (This was not always the case though.) I have no doubts the program has significant benefits, but concludes each school will need to make their own, possibly unique, solutions to maximise the potential of these benefits eg (in this school) to complement the program with a junior program to prevent the 'hole', and therefore create a 'pathway' for students into the senior school. Bad habits and negative perceptions of school experience that are well established by the end of Grade 8 are hard to undo. Could Grade 8 students be considered for some of the courses?"

"Another consideration that might explain my year group's general lack of interest in many of the programs offered could be because our school already..."
Some schools describe how it operates: offering projects. Organisational issues associated with day timetable to minimise some of the programs did not compete with what we had on offer eg we had our school musical happening when the Natural Therapies course was on. Initially there was a great flurry of interest from students, but as they gradually realised it clashed with what was an offer at our school, the numbers dwindled to way under our quota.”

RECOMMENDATION 7B:
“… how the form of activities within RL/RF can be structured within the school’s timetable in order to minimise disadvantage to students”

We asked:
- What evidence exists of plans to minimise disruption?
- What is being done?
- What is known about the current state of disruption?

Action:
Within the group of schools, there has been active planning for a common day timetable to minimise some of the organisational issues associated with offering projects.

Some schools describe how it operates:
- “We’ve set up our school around Thursday as a ‘flex day’. In addition to that, every six weeks we have an ‘experiential week’, when a full week is given over to activities. We’ll be trying to align some of the RL/RF activities into the experiential week and setting it up on Thursdays as agreed.”
- “At Claremont HS, Thursdays are timetabled with options only.”
- “All the schools have agreed to try to keep Thursday as ‘disruption day’ in 2005. This will be the day when much of RL/RF happens as well as sport, projects etc. We hope this will help but we know it won’t totally solve the problem. In 2004, RL/RF has been quite disruptive to our overall program but we see the benefits as worth the disruption.”

Some of the projects that have been week-long activities are also considering whether they would be able to operate appropriately and more efficiently on a one-day-a-week model, and thus fit in with this time-tabling. Others may stay in a ‘block’ format and seek to coordinate with ‘experience weeks’.

Other comments indicate that these issues remain within some schools: “Students do need to be taken out of other classes to attend this program”; “This will hopefully minimise disruption. Current state often means frustration between subject teachers and RL/RF”; “There are two or three teachers who kids say have asked them not to attend (RL/RF projects)”.

On the other hand, the Executive officer notes that there have been “very few comments received this year from staff re disruptions. I believe there are two possible reasons for this. Firstly, there appears to be a higher level of acceptance of the project with more people including staff and parents aware of the program and seeing benefits. Secondly, school coordinators and staff are now counselling students about their need to commit to both projects and to work missed whilst on RL/RF activities and staff are negotiating more realistic and often complementary work loads for students on RL/RF activities.”

While the common Thursday may ease some of concerns, it may have some ‘down-sides’ as well. While it doesn’t mean that nothing will happen on other days, that there will still be week-long projects, and that students will be able to link through the eLearning network to do work at different times, some misgivings have been expressed about whether:
- a common timetable will restrict some students and what they can do;
- some teachers will say: ‘I thought this was going to be just on Thursday’;
- the ‘specialness’ of RL/RF for students will be lost if it becomes ‘another subject’ – “it starts to timetable it all a bit the same – the structure seems to be the same, so the programs start to look the same.”

However, project coordinators also note that: “there are a lot of things that are better done in different ways. So I don’t think this (timetabling) is being seen to destroy that. It’s there to make some logistical problems easier.”

RECOMMENDATION 8A:
“…develop clear forward planning of the nature and timing of its activities …”

We asked:
- What evidence is there of forward planning of 2004’s and 2005’s activities?

Action:
The forward planning for 2005 was severely disrupted by the consequences of the Atelier Report. The Executive officer noted in October that: ‘other issues have only recently been resolved, ie confirmation of continuation of project, so planning can now proceed. Financial issues are still the highest priority as this will determine the size/shape etc of RL/RF in 2005. In many ways its almost like starting again as RL/RF will need to find ways to sit comfortably in numerous clusters and still command the loyalty and energy of the partner schools.”

At the end of 2004, however, with some of these issues resolved, planning for the activities in 2005 was able to proceed, and a timetable and descriptions were issued to schools in early December.

In parallel with the Project Based Learning aspect of RL/RF, there has also been intensive and continued planning around the introduction of the eLearning network.
RECOMMENDATION 8B:

“… There needs to be clear communication of what is available to staff and students…”

We asked:
What evidence is there of clear and advance communication of planned activities to staff and students?

Action:
Once the 2004 program was established through acceptance of school offerings, the timetable of activities could be publicised within schools. This was important, as it enabled students to look over the range of activities and their structures, and to plan what they wishes to take part in.

There are still some reservations and concerns – about internal school communication: “This needs work – many teachers unaware of workings/ exact…”, about the choice of students: “Some reservations re ‘only the good can go’; and about the lack of background information: “I have found chasing up forms etc not clear as to the type of information needed on forms - often I have felt I have been left to make up a permission form without background from the person running the activity.”

RECOMMENDATION 8C:

“Students’ selection should involve counselling about implications of undertaking RL/RF activities for access to other curriculum areas …”

We asked:
What evidence is there of counselling taking place?
What is known about how effective this has been?

Action:
Some of these schools note their practices:
- “We use Grade meetings, one-to-one conferencing with students, and DSS support staff”
- “Our students now have a pretty good idea of what being enrolled in RL/RF means. Given that we’re repeating the program next year, the grade teams will be able to work with the students on knowing what’s available.”
- “Students approach me along with staff as to what is involved. It’s effective - very good.”
- “This is the task of coordinators of the grade. This is done effectively by them.”
- “Grade coordinators talk about it at grade assemblies.”

However, another school says that “although this is the ideal that we are working towards, there is insufficient time for this.”

RECOMMENDATION 9:

“Time for reflection needs to be provided for all staff involved at school and Program levels… approximately half a day a term (for) all appropriate staff are able to get together”...

We asked:
What time and events have been provided to bring staff together to ‘report, reflect and plan’?
What happens on these occasions?
How effective have these been?

RECOMMENDATION 10A:

“A systematised collection of information about the Program impact should be carried out…”

We asked:
Has such a collection of data been planned?

Action:
The Program keeps good records of who is involved and in what (“we do have office data collection about who has been involved where”), but this is not extended to look at impacts of participation.

This review has again highlighted the need for systematic plans to be put in place to track issues such as school attendance, retention, suspension and other indicators. It should be possible to plan such data collection in advance, specifying the nature of the data to be collected over a year, but, as one respondent notes: “time again is the problem. Provision has to be made for this at the beginning of the program.”

RECOMMENDATION 10B:

“… sample data around attendance, behaviour ... at a school level and also overall analysis of suspension and retention data at a District level.”

We asked:
Has such data collection been implemented? How?
What data? What collation of it?
What is shown?

Action:
These issues are noted above as continuing. Responsibility for both planning and collection of this data needs to be determined between the Program and individual schools. On the one hand, the Program says: “We have no knowledge of what is being collected at the individual school level, and there does not appear to be material at the District level other than OER statistics.” On the other hand, schools note that they check attendance at Program activities but ask: “Who by?? It would be anecdotal at best.”
Curriculum Linkage and Integration

After two years of operation, how do schools see the RL/RF Program in relation to their school curriculum? Is it something separate – a ‘bolted on’ program? Or has it become more integrated into overall curriculum approaches?

While the overall impression was that there had been substantial movements towards greater integration (and there were positive symptoms such as decreased reports of teacher complaints about students being out of their classes), there is also great variation from school to school as to the degree to which this has happened. The schools were asked to provide some descriptions of what was occurring in 2004.

**BOTHWELL DISTRICT SCHOOL**

“At Bothwell District School, the Real Learning Real/Futures programs will be an integrated component of the curriculum for all Grade 9 and 10 students. As a small school, we have limited resources and RL/RF offers our students opportunities to engage in learning activities outside the scope of the school. This provides a more equitable education experience for our rural students.

“RL/RF fits neatly within the curriculum structure for 2005. Students will be engaged in Core Skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT and Health and Wellbeing) and integrated transdisciplinary studies, community learning projects and personal learning projects. RL/RF will be an aspect of the community and personal learning components of the curriculum package.”
NEW NORFOLK HIGH SCHOOL

“There’s not a hierarchy of subject delivery any more. That’s a much more fundamental change to structure than just a Thursday timetable (which) is a mechanical solution to a difficult problem. You’ve just got to have a philosophy in the school that says that kids don’t have to be in classes when they go other places. So it’s a philosophical and pedagogical thing, not a structural thing.

“RL/RF is still at an elementary structural level. We’re saying “We’ll put things in our timetable on Thursday afternoon that it doesn’t matter if kids miss” rather than saying ‘this is integral to our timetable, and this is an important aspect’. The pedagogy and the curriculum are strong enough not to have to expect that all 24 to 25 kids are in your class every minute.

“It’s about kids owning the time, not teachers. What the kids are learning is important, not just what the teacher’s delivering.”

OATLANDS DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

“RL/RF is part of a diverse range of subjects and options offered to students. In a similar focus to Rosetta HS, students are encouraged to develop their personal profiles and RL/RF fits well in this area.

“We believe the RL/RF programs have so much value that, where they do cut across the existing school timetable, there is an acceptance of that value and they are valued as part of the timetable.

“Flexibility is a strength of the Essential Learnings and all learning opportunities that benefit students have a place. We believe it is not always possible to formally timetable programs undertaken by very small groups of students, but this does not diminish their value or relegate them to ‘add ons’.”

COSGROVE HIGH SCHOOL

“We are trying to integrate RL/RF within the normal timetable and problem-based learning program. We are locating the Community Garden and Artisans projects within the Essential Learnings units plus Communication, by incorporating the Key Learning Areas of Science, Maths, SOSE and MDT.

“Cosgrove has worked out the Throughlines 7-10 for 2005, and it is hopeful that, with our Glenorchy Council partnership agreement, some programs will dovetail into RL/RF”

ROSETTA HIGH SCHOOL

“At Rosetta there is a suite of programs focused on grade 9 and 10 students, of which RL/RF is one part. All students in Grade 9 and 10 take part in Make It Real, which has the following elements: personal challenge, enterprise, work, and school and community service.

“In addition, a group of 30 students who have not been experiencing success at school partake in a program called Make It Work. Make It Work includes work placements, tutoring, mentoring and access to programs in the regular curriculum, but the key feature for those in the program is that they have their own Individual Learning Plan which is customised to suit their needs. The students in Make It Work are also involved in Make It Real, so their actual program is made up of a set of negotiated options, set around a core that includes literacy, numeracy and IT.

“School is the hub of learning and the ‘broker’ of learning opportunities; links are made to ‘master classes’ with expert input (for which students receive learning credits), ‘home schoolers’, working in the community, work-based learning, after-school study support, residential/outdoor experiences, individually negotiated learning modules via internet or school intranet, and summer schools.

“In 2005, all students in Grades 9 and 10 will have a program that has these characteristics. Hence the project-based learning aspect of RL/RF features as options within this framework. Because the program is embedded, students may not be aware that they are actually taking part in RL/RF – it is just their Individual Learning Plan.

“As the eLearning network unfolds and students have their own virtual space (the digital portfolio), the integrated nature of the program will be further developed.”
Discussion and Program Directions

The major areas of achievement for the Project Based Learning component of RL/RF in 2004 have been:

- The continued agreement of the original schools to continue to operate together across their new clusters;
- The delivery of an increased number of activities to a greater number of students, including significant numbers of students ‘at risk’;
- The increased specification of project goals against the Essential Learnings;
- Agreement on the implementation of a common timetabling structure to begin in 2005.

The development of the eLearning Network has also been a major initiative this year, and its operation in 2005 will be closely monitored.

BROADER PROGRAM IMPACT

The Program continues to draw widespread interest both within the State and from visitors. It continues to be seen as a model for inter-school cooperation, for development of ‘authentic learning’ and for the development of non-deficit curriculum approaches that extend educational access and success to ‘at risk’ students.

By October 2004, the Program had 211 interstate and overseas visitors, and had made presentations at approximately a dozen local and international conferences. A side impact of this interest is that considerable Principal, teacher and Executive Officer time has had to be devoted to this liaison and publicity work.

To some extent, because of the structural changes occurring within the District and the Department, 2004 has been a ‘holding’ year of consolidation for the Project Based Learning component of RL/RF.

For similar reasons, this will continue in 2005.

There is also local interest in extending the partnership, with approaches from three other schools in 2004. Two of these new schools will probably join the Network in 2005 – one is already in a cluster with two of the existing RL/RF schools.

Internally, the extension of RL/RF approaches within the participating schools is important. RL/RF participants are learning important lessons about the needs of ‘at risk’ students and about structure and processes of curriculum that responds to their needs. This experience should be regarded as a valuable asset within the professional development of staff within the schools in this network. Supporting such staff to present information about what they do (there are some staff who still, reportedly, have little idea of what RL/RF is) and how they teach, would also assist these people to reflect on their on-going practices.

One teacher reflected on the impact of his experiences in teaching within RL/RF: “for my own teaching practice … Having seen the task-based learning is working in RL/RF … I’m also a Maths teacher and there are a lot of good task-based learning resources there, so I’m asking myself: ‘how come I’m not using more of these, and how can I best structure the whole Grade 7 to 10 Maths area around task-based approaches?’”

It was also suggested that the experiences of staff provide a valuable resource in assisting all staff in these schools in their development, particularly as all staff are facing similar issues under the Essential Learnings. Some ideas were raised about strategising for the RL/RF Program to have an impact on teaching approaches in schools, rather than simply assuming that ideas would carry over; enabling other staff to be involved as learners within RL/RF activities, and hence able to reflect on methods of learning; and for students who have been involved in RL/RF activities to teach teachers. The same teacher quoted above also talks about collaborative planning in his school and how this enables the ideas to move to other people.

“It may be a surprise for some schools to find that their students are really performing well in RL/RF situations because of the different culture,” suggested one project teacher.
FUTURE FUNDING MODELS

The RL/RF Network has committed itself to the adoption of a Business Development Model for its long-term funding. This will involve identifying a range of sources, within the schools, the Department and the wider community, to ensure ongoing operation.

It is worth noting some of the resourcing recommendations contained in the Essential Learnings for All Report:

“...the community of schools (ie cluster) would also receive a resource package based on the identification of local needs, moderated at the branch level but allocated by the schools division corporate management team. This community of schools resource package would be designed to implement inclusive programs targeted at issues identified in student outcome analysis to meet the needs of all students, including students with special and/or additional educational needs...” The resource package would provide funding for the implementation of flexible approaches across the community of schools and for professional learning initiatives. Current MARSSS and Flying Start funding would be incorporated into the package...” (Atelier, pages 72-3)

While it is recognised that such a schools resource package is probably principally envisaged to provide support for individual students, it does leave a door ajar for propositions around inter-school curriculum provisions that cater for 'students with special and/or additional educational needs'.

It is also worth noting that at least four other states in Australia have reasonably well-funded state-run youth development programs (including Advance in Victoria, Activ8 in South Australia, and Cadets WA in Western Australia) that have similar goals and activities to RL/RF, and which provide funding for participating schools at the level of around $400-$450 per student (though expecting that costs of special uniforms will be included within this).

FURTHER ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

At the end of 2004, the following issues have also been raised through this Review:

CELEBRATION

The suggestion of planned celebration, information and reflection was re-endorsed in 2004 by project and Grade coordinators. Such an occasion would be seen as an opportunity to celebrate achievements as well as to convey information about what projects did. It would provide, at the end of the year, a chance for debriefing and asking about what was important in learning. “Because we’re in a fairly pressured situation, it’s that time to reflect and celebrate that we don’t do particularly well.”

PUBLICITY: REPRESENTATION OF PROJECT BY STUDENTS

In 2004, in response to student uncertainties about what was involved in a couple of the projects (Robotics and Multimedia) examples have been taken to schools by staff and students. Students in Multimedia produced a substantial (and still growing) documentation of projects that both represented the range of offerings, and also practically illustrated work in Multimedia.

It is strongly suggested that such approaches continue and that any opportunities be taken to build student-to-student information, publicity and instruction into the Program’s processes.

MONITORING OF IMPACT

Steps have been taken at the end of 2004 to establish some patterns and procedures for the collection of information that reflects the Program’s impact on individual students, on cohorts and on schools. If this information is to be useful for the Program’s reflection (and publicity), it needs to be built into the regular data-gathering of schools.

For example, it is suggested that schools could relatively easily accumulate the information already being collected about attendance, suspensions and behaviour in ways that enable comparisons with RL/RF activities. Further, as assessment measures emerge within the specification of subjects and activities against the Essential Learnings, this information can throw light upon the impact of RL/RF.

It is strongly suggested that some simple pro formas be developed at the start of 2005 around agreed areas for data collection, and that implementation of these be negotiated with the appropriate Grade Coordinators within the schools.

TIME TO MEET AND REFLECT

This review recognises the range of demands on teachers, particularly Grade Coordinators, within schools, however strongly suggests that provision continue to be made for time for all relevant personnel to meet, discuss and reflect on their work.

A need for further staff development has been noted. This will be particularly important for both teachers and non-teacher mentors, in two main areas: effective teaching and learning approaches with ‘at risk’ students; and understanding of project goals and assessments.
Time remains a key factor in implementation of RL/RF. Both grade coordinators and project coordinators regularly identify the lack of time to complete their roles satisfactorily. As RL/RF requires further areas to develop – principally course planning, student assessment and communication of outcomes – these pressures will increase. The program needs to monitor time pressures to ensure that staff are able to meet these requirements, and to plan ways to ease time pressures through provision of pro formas and formatted procedures. It is suggested that, for example, recording of student assessments through a digital portfolio might eventually ease some time pressures, but in the short term, while it is being introduced, this is also likely to increase pressures.

**PROJECT SELECTION AND ORGANISATION**

An emerging challenge for RL/RF will be to be more ‘selective’ and strategic about the nature of the projects being included. What assumptions are being made about what students need or about what will engage them? How do these relate to abilities of schools to provide these? It is suggested that ‘simply having students attend and do an activity is not enough; this form of ‘weak activity’ needs to be pushed to define its goals. If it can’t do that, then it should be dropped.”

It is also clear that students from some schools, particularly District High Schools, cannot access some projects because of projects’ organisational structures (in particular, small project time allocations between lengthy travel times). In addition, in some cases, the organisational arrangements for a project mean that sessional staff are less involved with the overall Program operation (and this will have implications for teaching and learning approaches, for assessment, for specification and achievement of objectives and so on). The program will need to examine the implications of the ways in which projects are offered (the length and placements of times) to ensure access for all students, and effective participation of staff.

It has been noted by some staff that it might be easier to move teachers (ie the skills) to students, rather than always ask students to move. Bricklaying has been doing this already: it has been offered in three locations, with students from three schools involved at each location. This minimises travel, and may offer a more economical model. Multimedia is also considering ways in which parts of the course can be done at different locations, or within individual schools.

**RECORDING AND SHARING ASSESSMENTS**

As the RL/RF projects develop their course objectives and processes in line with the key learning outcomes of the Essential Learnings, the assessment criteria in these areas will also be more clearly specified. It is recognised that, in the words of one project leader: “Some are still light on – they’re still being worked on.” It is the intention of the Digital Portfolios within the eLearning Network that these assessments will be more easily captured, stored, shared and made available for Grade Coordinators to use.

As noted elsewhere, it will continue to be important that assessments provided within RL/RF are seen as having parity with those provided for other school activities. It is quite likely that if such arrangements are made around assessments, that this will drive closer integration of RL/RF activities with all schools’ curricula.

Further, the nature of the digital portfolios will enable students to play a more proactive role in deciding on evidence to present around their assessments. Where this necessarily happens in a ‘distributed school’ environment, and where it happens in diverse ways to reflect practical, hands-on and authentic learning, it could provide an important model for other assessment practices within the Network schools.

However, this process will require support, particularly as there are different models for operating these activities: some are run by a teacher, some by a teacher and community mentor in partnership, and some by a community mentor alone (with the teacher perhaps as supervisor). In the latter case in particular, there are issues about who would be expected to be involved in assessment, and the nature of support they would need. “It would be better,” suggests one teacher involved in such a situation, “to sit down and talk with the mentor, rather than expect them to write assessments.” But some structure is required for this.

“We haven’t moved the assessment yet,” says one Principal, “but we’ve talked about it and we will.”

**CURRICULUM IMPACT**

The impact on the curriculum of each of the participating schools remains central to the work of RL/RF. Where these approaches remain an ‘add-on’ or ‘distraction’ from the ‘real’ timetabled and structure, they will not succeed in providing valid learning choices for students.

Thus one of the most important challenges for all schools within the Network is to maintain the focus on how RL/RF links with the range of learning areas and approaches offered to students. Some schools have written about the current situations for this Report, and these provide some indications of plans and realities in 2004-5. It is suggested that all schools monitor their programs against these hopes in order to assess ways in which to better integrate RL/RF projects.
Recommendations

Since 2004 has marked a period of consolidation of RL/RF in the face of changed Departmental structures, there has been less attention in this Report to a formal set of recommendations. To some extent, the recommendations raised in the previous Report are in a continuing process of being addressed.

However, throughout the previous discussion, there are several suggestions for further Program development. These are accumulated here:

**ROLE OF STUDENTS**

- Information to teachers and students about the nature of at least some of the projects needs to be made available in more detail. It is *suggested* that student participants could play a strong role in formally presenting information and examples to other students through displays, demonstrations or ‘tasters’.

- It is *suggested* that some form of whole-Program celebration be planned at the end of the year. While this is too late for 2004, it should be built into the 2005 Program. It would enable all students to draw together what they’d done, tell each other about achievements, celebrate successful outcomes and also reflect on their learning (higher order thinking).

**DATA COLLECTION ON PROGRAM IMPACT**

- It is *suggested* that schools could relatively easily accumulate the information already being collected about attendance, suspensions and behaviour in ways that enable comparisons with RL/RF activities. However this will not happen unless procedures are put in place at the start of the 2005 school year to enable it. Further, such procedures should be simple and build upon existing data collection rather than demand more work of coordinators.

- It is strongly *suggested* that some simple *pro formas* be developed at the start of 2005 around agreed areas for data collection, and that implementation of these be negotiated with the appropriate Grade Coordinators within the schools.
TIME TO MEET

• This review recognises the range of demands on teachers, particularly Grade Coordinators, within schools, however it is strongly suggested that provision continue to be made for time for all relevant personnel to meet, discuss and reflect on their work.

PROJECT SELECTION AND ORGANISATION

• In preparing for 2006 activities, it is suggested that RL/RF be more ‘selective’ and strategic about the nature of the projects that are included. It is further suggested that RL/RF develop clear criteria for decisions about the mix of projects to be offered within the Program.

• It is suggested that the Program examine the implications of the ways in which projects are offered (the length and placements of times, geographic placement of activities) in order to ensure access for all students, and effective participation of staff.

INTEGRATION OF RL/RF INTO SCHOOL PROGRAMS

• It remains central to the work of RL/RF that it is an integrated part of the curriculum of each of the participating schools. One of the most important challenges for all schools within the Network remains on how RL/RF links with the range of learning areas and approaches offered to students.

• It is suggested that all schools monitor their programs in order to assess ways in which they can better integrate RL/RF projects within their overall curriculum.

ASSESSMENT

• It continues to be important that assessments provided within RL/RF are seen as having parity with those provided for other school activities.

The nature of the digital portfolios will enable students to play a more proactive role in deciding on evidence to present around their assessments. The assessment process requires support, particularly as there are different models for operating these activities, and it is suggested that a structure be developed to support teachers and mentors in providing students’ assessments within RL/RF.

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

• The experience of teaching within RL/RF should be regarded as a valuable asset for the professional development of staff within the schools in this network. It is suggested that such staff be provided with opportunities to present information about what they do and how they teach within RL/RF, in order to assist other staff to reflect on and develop their own practices.
The Australian Youth Research Centre is located within the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for relevant and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

The aims of the AYRC are to:

• conduct relevant, coherent and reliable research on young people in Australia, with a state, national and international focus;
• assist with the development of policy and the implementation of initiatives based on research findings;
• develop strong links with the youth affairs sector, with particular attention to helping to identify and address the sector’s research needs;
• facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and youth workers;
• support the research activities of university staff and post-graduate students who have a specific interest in youth affairs; and,
• enhance the professional development of staff and students by assisting them to be informed about the broader context of young people’s lives.

Australian Youth Research Centre Activities

The AYRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main AYRC activities are:

• undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
• providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
• assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

AYRC activities involve:

• undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
• providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
• enabling academics to participate in established AYRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
• maintaining a youth sector resource library;
• publishing series of Working Papers and Research Reports;
• conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.