The following details form the greater part of the recently announced computer education program for New South Wales which, despite being referred to by the minister for Education, Dr Metherell, by the inappropriate title of the ‘School Link’ program, is a comprehensive assault on the problems which have plagued computer education since its inception. I have no doubt that if the program is fully implemented, it will set standards which other states in Australia will have to match.

I say IF because those who have followed the politics in NSW since the March 1988 state elections will realise that there is still the possibility that it may be used as a political football in the game which the minister appears to be playing with the politicians, unions, teachers, electors and bureaucrats in the state. However, I have been assured that there is a great amount of resolve within the department to carry the project through despite political developments which might impede it. With that in mind though, I must make it clear that the following details come from a release dated 30th August and have been checked as accurate as of 11th September. That is not to say that there may not be changes by the time this is being read. A senior officer of the department feels that even if there are changes in the short term, they will only be minor and the overall program will continue.

The program is a four year program which covers all aspects of computer education at all levels. The original budget of $12 m was for a much more modest program which sought to make some real gains on the commonwealth and state programs of the past few years. However, the promise of an additional $52 m from the new Liberal government provided the opportunity to expand it to include so many of the things which had for a long time been put into the “too hard” basket in a state with the population of NSW.

The computer education program coincides with the implementation of Board of Secondary Education approved syllabuses in years 7-10 and 11-12. Although this is purely a coincidence, it is a fortuitous one as the department would have been required to spend a great deal of its resources in supporting these new subjects.

The program covers the following general areas:

- Professional development of teachers
- Training Computer Education Coordinators
- Purchase of hardware for educational use
- Purchase of software for educational use
- Computer Classrooms
- Electronic Communication
- Increased consultancy support
- Administrative Computing in Schools (funded separately, NOT from the $64 m)

**Professional Development of Teachers**

The program provides funds to the Head Office Computer Education Unit (CEU) for the preparation and delivery of professional development courses and activities in all areas of the curriculum and at all grade levels.

These activities will include:-

* The development of ‘self-teaching modules’ so that school staff can run activities in their own school.
* Video tape and video broadcast material.
* Specific workshops designed to meet the needs of groups of teachers, school executives and the inspectorate.
* Organising regular conferences between Regional and Head Office Consultants working in the area of Computer Education.

Funds are also provided for Regional activities which cater to the needs of individual schools and which meet Regional priorities.

These may include:-

* Visits by the consultants to schools to talk to staff.
* Short courses dealing with a specific topic of interest to several schools.

**Training Computer Education Coordinators**

A specific course will be developed by the CEU to train those persons designated as Computer Education Coordinator in each of the secondary schools.

In the case of primary schools, packages of short courses will be developed to meet their needs.

**Computer Education Coordinator Allowance**

Provision has been made for the allocation to all schools for an allowance for a Computer Education Coordinator.

The allowance is provided to enable schools to release an existing member of staff to carry out the coordination function described in general terms below.

The Computer Education Coordinator is expected to:

* be responsible to the Principal for the implementation of
was concerned, only equipment which was purchased from previous grant money would be counted as part of a school’s equipment level.

* These grants will assist schools to achieve a hardware level close to one computer in every primary classroom and an additional 15 computers in every secondary school.

* Some of the grant money may be used by schools to improve the security of computers and the ease with which students have access to them by purchasing transport frames or trolleys where the machines are not located in a separate, permanent computer room.

* Regions will be able to purchase essential items of hardware to enable them to run effective staff development programs.

Provision of Software for Classroom Use

Provision has been made for the allocation of funds to purchase and develop high-quality educational software.

* To support the curriculum use of computers, funds will be made available to schools in the form of grants to enable them to purchase high quality educational software.

* The software purchased will not only support the new secondary syllabuses in Computer Awareness and Computing Studies but will also support the use of computers in all curriculum areas at all grade levels.

* Primary Schools will be given grants to purchase software to assist students to learn about computers and computing by using computers for learning in all subject areas.

* The CEU will continue to purchase software for trial and evaluation by schools.

* The results of the evaluations will be published to schools to enable them to make informed choices before purchasing and will be added to the National Software Review Database to share the information with other States and to obtain corresponding information from the other States and Territories.

* The CEU will continue to develop support materials for existing commercial software so that schools may make better use of the software in a range of subject areas.

* The CEU will also continue to develop software to meet the expressed needs of schools where no commercial alternative is available.

* Funds will be provided to Regions to enable them to purchase essential software for professional development activities and for trial by schools.

Computer Classrooms

The program makes provision for the establishment of specialist computer rooms in all secondary schools although it presupposes that there is available free classroom space. What happens if there is no free space, or if the space is not suitable for conversion, has not been spelled out. However, as with many other parts of the program, the inclusion of this initiative is to be applauded for its intent. With the increase in use of computers in schools, which will be accelerated by this program, there is a need to provide an appropriate environment in which students use the systems. Lighting, ventilation, adequate power outlets and space for off-keyboard activities are essentials.

* This program provides funds for the conversion of existing free space to approximate the specifications of new suites which have been designed by the Building Codes Committee for all new secondary schools.

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NSW staffers claiming right education formula

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* Secondary schools will be able, over the life of this program, to make submissions to their Regional Properties Officer seeking conversion of appropriate classrooms.

* Conversion will be undertaken in accordance with funds available and according to Regional priorities.

In primary schools where it is expected that the computers will become a part of the classroom equipment and not be collected into a special room, there is a need to provide adequate security for the equipment whilst maintaining a pleasant learning environment.

* Some funds will be available from the hardware grants to enable primary schools to use part of their grants to improve the security of their computers either by purchasing carry baskets or trolleys to enable the systems to be rapidly placed in a secure store.

* The School Furniture Complex will continue developmental work on appropriate tables and trolleys.

Electronic Communications
For some time now, many schools in NSW have been taking part in trials using Telememo (now Keylink). The extension of these activities forms part of the program but is unduly emphasised with the use of the term "school link" by which the program has been promulgated by the minister. There is a common misconception that the program has been principally devised to enable networking of schools, especially for administrative applications. That is definitely not the case as can be seen from the various components. As if to further emphasise this fact, schools will receive only a subsidy towards the costs incurred in using the electronic mail service. Hardware and software for administrative applications ARE NOT funded from this program at all. It is also envisaged that schools will access a number of remote database services which meet their curriculum needs.

Consultancy
Curriculum implementation in the Department operates under the so-called "three-tier" model with Head Office consultancy providing assistance to the schools through the Regions.

11 additional positions at the Computer Education Unit will be filled from the beginning of next year and a further 9 positions will be filled in 1990.

The program provides additional funds to each region to provide Regional Computer Education Consultants and support staff to augment the existing regional provision. Each region will be funded to employ an additional Consultant from the beginning of Term 1 1989 together with a Clerical Assistant to assist with the management of regional resources and programs. An additional position will be made available in Term 3 1989.

Provision of Software and Purchase of Hardware for Administrative Use
Funding for this aspect will be additional to the $64 m provided for classroom use of computers in education. Currently there are over 30 schools (at least three in each region) which are trialling the proposed system.

* The Department of Education has let tenders for the hardware required and is completing school-based trials of the software to ensure that it meets the needs of the Department and the schools.

* Schools will be progressively issued with the complete software system as soon as the current trialling is completed. The package called OASIS (Office Automation and School Information System) caters for:
  - library management;
  - financial management;
  - school information;
  - student information and
  - office automation.

Schools will be provided with the software at no cost to the school since the Department owns the rights to the total package.

* Financial assistance will be provided to schools for the purchase of hardware.

The computer education program is comprehensive and provides for all of the features which computer educators have been requesting for many years. Successful implementation of this program will result in a long overdue major boost to computers in education in NSW. Quite clearly, there have been people both within the department and outside it who have been waiting for the political climate to be able to implement such a program.

"No matter what else he does, the Minister is to be congratulated in biting the bullet and allocating funds for such an important initiative."