

Yvette Goss  
Education and Training Workforce:  
Schools Productivity Commission  
Locked Bag 2  
Collins Street East  
Melbourne Vic 8003  
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Dear Ms Goss

Attached you will find a summary submission to the Education and Training Workforce which outlines the role Lewis & Lewis has played in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's student support services reviews that have occurred in the state of Victoria and the complementary service the company provides to supplement the Allied Health workforce in the government education system.

In particular, this submission will outline the role of Lewis & Lewis in the Victorian State Government's decision to provide an outsourced assessment service to complement the student support services program across Victoria. In addition, Lewis & Lewis provides an Allied Health Locum Service to schools and networks of schools across the state.

As you will see, the assessment and locum service Lewis & Lewis provides across Victoria is a model which has been instrumental in improving the health and wellbeing support provided to students and schools in this state.

I look forward to your consideration of our submission and please accept our willingness to provide additional information to you or members of the Commission.

Yours sincerely

Mark Lewis  
Director

## **SUBMISSION TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING WORKFORCE: SCHOOLS PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

### *Introduction:*

Lewis & Lewis is a successful, expanding company with a reputation for expertise in psychology, speech pathology and learning difficulties developed over fifteen years in business. It is a quality endorsed company.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Victoria provides an assessment service to support applications for the Program for Students with Disabilities on behalf of students in Victorian government schools in the categories of Intellectual Disability (ID) and Severe Language Disorder with Critical Educational Needs (SLD-CEN).

Lewis & Lewis is contracted by the Department to manage and administer the assessment service and is required to work closely with the Department's Student Wellbeing Division, regions and schools to manage and administer the assessment service.

All assessments are conducted by qualified and fully registered psychologists and speech pathologists and an extensive management structure has been developed within the company to manage the large number of assessments conducted across the state.

In addition, Lewis & Lewis provides Allied Health staff (school psychologists, speech pathologists and social workers) as a Locum Service across the state of Victoria to fill short and longer term vacancies within the DEECD Allied Health workforce. This service complements and works within the parameters of the Student Support Services workforce.

### *Background to the establishment of an Assessment Service in Victoria:*

Since 2005, an Outsourced Assessment Service has been operating to administer the assessments for the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD), initially as a trial and then fully implemented in May 2007.

Prior to 2005, there was not a consistent model for assessments across the state. Student Support Services Officers (guidance officers), external contractors or a combination of both undertook the assessments. Lewis & Lewis provided assessment service support in 4 of the 9 regions in the state at that time.

One of the major aims of introducing a statewide assessment service was to increase the objectivity in decision making for the assessment process for students in respect of applications to the PSD and that there be a separation of personnel undertaking assessments from those providing additional school based support to those students. In addition, it was felt that an outsourced assessment model would maximize the standardization of decision making and provide greater quality control and also enable student services staff to undertake a range of other work rather than responding to an increasing assessment workload. The implementation of an outsourced assessment service was also

seen to provide more flexibility and be an additional service to the ongoing support for students provided by student support services staff.

In 2007 and 2009, two independent reviews of the assessment service were completed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and confirmed that the model was sound. The reviews made a range of recommendations which have subsequently been implemented.

*Current status of the DEECD Assessment Service:*

Lewis & Lewis currently provides in excess of 5,000 assessments to support new applications to the PSD, Year 6-7 Reviews and applications for students with short-term funding and recommends to schools whether assessment results indicate that an application for the PSD should proceed. It responds to all (approximately 1,600) government schools across the state of Victoria. In addition, the outsourced assessment service is able to respond to assessment requests from right across the state, including regional remote areas, where previously service delivery was infrequent or non-existent.

The assessment service integrates with existing support structures for schools and students in relation to the provision of support for students with disabilities and students with additional learning needs. This service has helped to ensure a coordinated approach to student welfare.

In addition, the assessment service:

- fosters and maintains good working relationships with schools, regions and networks via ongoing communication and liaison.
- provides professional development to regions on the assessment service and assessment processes and procedures.
- maintains a high standard of professionalism in relationships with schools, parents, students, and regional staff.

Lewis & Lewis have developed sophisticated procedures and database technology to successfully service all Victorian government schools.

The current assessment service contract with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is in place until the end of 2012 with a 1+1 extension option.

Accountability to DEECD is extensive and includes comprehensive reporting requirements both quarterly and annual reports.

Output/performance targets and indicators are stringent and have been met in all instances, including satisfaction surveys for all major stakeholder groups, eligibility rates and timelines for response and report writing times.

Examples of de-identified Annual and Quarterly reports verifying the above are available on request.

*Current status of the Locum Service:*

The Lewis & Lewis Locum Service has expanded in recent years and now provides schools across the state with a reliable and consistent Allied Health workforce that can assist children and young people facing barriers to achieving their educational potential.

Lewis & Lewis Allied Health staff are fully inducted into their roles and supported and supervised by senior staff while they are working in their locum placements. Many Lewis & Lewis senior staff have previously worked in the DEECD as Allied Health professionals and therefore bring intimate knowledge and experience to their support and supervision roles.

The flexibility the locum service provides and the integrated service alignment with the DEECD Student Support Services model ensures effective support for students with additional needs across schools within Victoria.

*Conclusion:*

In considering the above summary information regarding the assessment and locum services implemented across Victoria, I would ask that the Schools Productivity Commission consider the above option in its deliberations which has been successfully implemented. Lewis & Lewis believes that this model provides a successful solution to some of the complexities of providing student wellbeing support to government schools. The assessment of students and the identification of disability was previously a key focus of the work of student services staff in Victoria.

The Locum Service also provides a responsive and effective model to supplement a service that increasingly appears to have difficulties with staff recruitment and retention. A Locum Service guarantees staff who are effectively trained and supported whilst they are working in the Allied Health positions.

Finally, through the implementation of an outsourced assessment service, Victorian student services staff now have the opportunity to broaden their role and ensure there is a greater focus on primary prevention and early intervention support in Victorian government schools.

Through the development and implementation of an Allied Health Locum Service, schools and networks are guaranteed effective replacement and continuity of service when DEECD Allied Health staff are on leave or positions are vacant.

Lewis & Lewis would welcome any opportunity to provide additional information to assist the Commission addressing the Terms of Reference in relation to this Research Report.

Further information about Lewis & Lewis can also be obtained on our website at:

<http://www.lewisandlewis.com.au>