

CPM Reviews

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Date of Recording: 22 May, 2019

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Identifier	Name / Position	Role
Mr Haggar:	Clive Haggar, Former Secretary	Interviewer
Mr March:	Mick March, Former Vice President	Interviewee

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Mr Haggar: It's the 22nd of May, and I'm with Dr Mick March, former Vice President of the ACT Teachers Federation and former principal of Narrabundah College. Mick, you've got an interesting tale to tell from the very first meeting as you see it of people wanting to found an independent union in the ACT for teachers who otherwise were members of the New South Wales Teachers Federation.

Mr March: Yes. That's correct. When we went – sorry. I'll start again, only because it's simpler to start with. We were members of the New South Wales Teachers Federation Secondary Teachers Association, and three of the prominent members there were Peter O'Connor, Dick Lee, myself and Barry Price. And, we'd been invited by Fraser to come along to listen to his second reading speech for the legislation to pass through Parliament.

Mr Haggar: This is for the establishment of - - -

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Mr March: For the establishment of a Commonwealth Teaching Service. So, from there of course we adjourned to a nearby watering hole. I think it was the Wello (Wellington), or it might have been the Kingston. But we were there, and we were talking about what are we going to do with this. We thought we're going to have to form a local teachers federation separate from New South Wales.

Mr Haggar: That was a very big step for you to consider.

Mr March: It was indeed. But we thought well how are we going to do it? And, the four of us were there, and I said 'Barry, are you interested?' He said 'No'. He was a bit different. And, Dick Lee I think was getting drinks at the bar, so when Dick came back, 'Dick would you be President?' So, that was sort of the way it started out. Now, that was a very informal meeting. No formalities at all. But for that time, I wish we would have gathered different people together in order to work towards it. We're the Secondary Teachers Association.

Mr Haggar: And, you were executive members of that association?

Mr March: Yes. Well, I'd been a member of the Secondary Teachers Association through most of the '60s. As a matter of fact, at one stage when the union was a little bit run down, John Edmonds, myself and Bruce – who's name I'll remember in a minute – we used to keep the thing running by taking it all to – we used to be President, Secretary and Treasurer to keep the thing rolling along. And, then we moved on then from the '60s into the '70s, and I'm still a member there, but there's other new members coming on as well. But this was at the start. Bruce Millen. Bruce Milne. I remember Bruce, one Saturday afternoon, he rang me up and he said 'You know what? I've just had a phone call from Malcolm Fraser,' and he said, 'I said to him 'Shut up Mick March,' and he said 'This is Malcolm Fraser'. And, he was inviting us to come along and listen to the second reading speech.

And so, Bruce Milne had then moved away to Dubbo or somewhere, and we were still keeping the thing going. There was a lot of other teachers coming in. So, the planning sort of began at that stage. We sort of gradually invited other people in, people from the primary association, and then Len Childs was still a big thing in the union then.

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Mr Haggar: **Now, is this before or after he was President of the New South Wales Teachers Federation?**

Mr March: I haven't exactly got that date Clive. But I remember we used to travel – I'm going back into the '60s now. Because we used to travel down to Sydney on Saturday on the plane together to go to represent the ACT at the New South Wales meetings.

Mr Haggar: **This is their council meetings?**

Mr March: Their council meetings. Yes. They were once a month or something like that. We used to go down there regularly. So, this would be in the '60s. And, I remember Ivor Lancaster getting very annoyed when I nominated Len for President, and he got elected President.

Mr Haggar: **And, it was I understand largely on the push from the ACT.**

Mr March: That's right. Yes. And, Jack Whalen was I think lined up to take the job, but we nominated Len and he got in. Now, that didn't necessarily lead to a lot of goodwill between us and New South Wales, because they were pushing for Jack and we pushed for Len. And, somehow or other we managed to get enough behind us to get him in.

Mr Haggar: **Was it a successful two year period that he had?**

Mr March: Vaguely. Because it occurred at the time with all the development happening in the ACT as well. And, Len was sort of – because he was teaching, I think at that stage at Queanbeyan, so he's still a New South Wales teacher. So, he sort of became divorced from what we were doing here, in the development of the federation here, and what was going on in Sydney. So, in fact – and I don't think his term down there was all that successful.

Mr Haggar: **So, once the decision was made – and the mass meeting in 1972 was a crucial decision-making meeting of the combined associations - - -**

Mr March: Well, all of this led to that, it was just getting ready for that meeting, to get people together like Ian McPhee representing the primary schools and so on, and get enough support from there to try and get the thing to be pushed through. Yes.

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Mr Haggar: **I was just thinking in terms of the attitude of the New South Wales Teachers Federation to the establishment of a separate union.**

Mr March: Well, they weren't all that pleased, because they wanted us to become a branch of the Australian Teachers Federation at the time. And, the Australian Teachers Federation was wanting also to negotiate with the Commonwealth about the registration and breakaway. And, at the time, I suppose we had become – through the '60s and early '70s we'd become fairly closely integrated into planning, for what eventually came to pass.

Mr Haggar: **In the ACT?**

Mr March: In the ACT. Look, I was on Secondary Schools Building Standards Committee with the NCDC and all that sort of stuff, and Fraser – give him credit – he was smart enough to see that he wanted the local teachers on side. And, to get the local teachers on side, he incorporated us into the planning building. And so, consequently I believe he was more interested in talking to us than talking to some outside body, the Australian Teachers Federation. And, that caused a bit of conflict etcetera. I think it might even be referenced in the papers that were written then.

So, anyway, that was basically is leading up to that 1972 meeting when we called everybody together, got the federation formed. I forget what – ten shillings a year or something like that.

Mr Haggar: **I think \$1 a year at the mass meeting was what was charged.**

Mr March: Whatever it was. It was a nominal amount to try and get as many people in as possible, because that all was a drive to get the numbers.

Mr Haggar: **One of the most effective recruitment tools I understand from that period was the notion that if you weren't a member of the Commonwealth Teachers Federation (ACT), you wouldn't get union members sitting on your eligibility panel. This is the new assessment panel for consideration for promotion.**

Mr March: Well, I don't remember that as being laid down as a definite condition. There may have been a veiled threat at the time. But I don't remember that ever at

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any executive meeting being discussed as a formal policy. But by all means we pushed as many levers as we could to get as many people interested and committed.

Mr Haggar: **And, of course the issue of formal registration in '74 would have meant that the union actually was the only body able to represent ACT teachers from that point on.**

Mr March: That's true. That's true. Yeah. Yes. And, that became possible I think because of the Commonwealth, but by then we were dealing with the Whitlam government. We were dealing with Kim Beazley (Snr.). And, they were automatically more interested in the local events. Because about the changeover period, the number of public servants who had wives who were in influential positions in the ACT P&Cs was very great. So, consequently there was a lot of support of them, informal support, at that level. And, I believe one of the first papers – sorry. I'm talking about something different now. I'm talking about the introduction of the Schools Authority.

Mr Haggar: **Yes. The interim authority.**

Mr March: The interim authority, yes, in 1973. Because one of the very early papers that Beazley got on his desk was the proposal for that, which came from the Wilson committee, which was headed by Sir George Currie.

Mr Haggar: **Otherwise known as the Currie Report.**

Mr March: The Currie Report. Yes. But Wilson was the local mover, and through the ANU and the Centre for Continuing Education. He was head of that, and that's where the thrust came from. People like Di Anderson, Kath Blakers, Netta Burns. There are a number of them. And, they were very strong, with a foot in the P&C and a foot in the ANU push. So, consequently they were very strongly in favour of it.

Mr Haggar: **So, you had the establishment of the Commonwealth Teaching Service covering ACT and NT, and then the interim authority.**

Mr March: Interim authority. Yes.

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- Mr Haggar:** Now, you had an interesting role, because at that time you were a Vice President of the ACT union, but at the same time through that position you were a member of the interim authority.
- Mr March: That's correct. Yeah.
- Mr Haggar:** So, in terms of your role on that authority, I know that there was some tension between being a nominee or being a representative. You might like to extrapolate on that for me if you can.
- Mr March: Well, I saw myself as a representative I think more than a nominee. Although we formally adopted the principle, the union formally adopted it, that the three nominees would be Vice Presidents.
- Mr Haggar:** And elected.
- Mr March:
- Mr Haggar:** And, the three of you came from the two major sectors of the teaching service, and Margaret being at primary school. Was she a principal at that - - -
- Mr March: No. No. She was an infants mistress.
- Mr Haggar:** Infants mistress? Right.
- Mr March: So, we looked at the stage – we had a high school teacher (myself), we had a primary principal, and we had Margaret who was an infants mistress.
- Mr Haggar:** And, were you a principal at this stage?
- Mr March: I became principal in 1972 when the Act was passed, and from the beginning of – I'm not quite sure of the dates. But about the end of first term 1973, Ken Gollan, who was principal at Narrabundah, was seconded by - - -
- Mr Haggar:** Hedley Beare?
- Mr March: No. Hedley Beare wasn't in the game until '75. He was seconded by Jack - - -
- Mr Haggar:** Jack Lenaham or Jock Weeden?

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Mr March: The chap who preceded him.

Mr Haggart: **Jock Weeden.**

Mr March: Jock Weeden. Yes. Jock seconded Ken Gollan into his office in the Commonwealth Teaching Service, and he was first I think appointee into there. And, I took over as principal as Narrabundah from that point on. And so, he – lots of things I won't mention – so what happened then was that I was just running the schools and doing this and that, getting around, and we used to – in those early days, by that time the Secondary Teachers Association had become sort of incorporated into all this, and Keith Lawler had become quite active there. I think he was on one of the early committees. The names I think I've got down there. And, we used to meet I think once a week for an hour or so.

Then of course the other thing which was moving was this proposal to have colleges. Because I'd been a member of the Building Standards Committee, and when I went off on my Churchill fellowship in 1969, I was asked to look at – I was looking at mathematics of course – but they asked me to look at senior high schools in America, and also in Britain, where they were talking about sixth form.

Mr Haggart: **Sixth form colleges?**

Mr March: Sixth form colleges. And so, anyway, I wasn't all that impressed at the time, because I was still a bit imbued with the New South Wales Teachers Federation attitude. Had to have a six year high school. So, I came back, and Fraser rang up and – I think Richard mentioned this - - -

Mr Haggart: **Richard Campbell.**

Mr March: Richard Campbell mentioned this at that meeting we were at the Teachers Resource Centre, that he got a phone call in the afternoon, call from the Department, to talk to Malcolm Fraser about this secondary college business.

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Mr Haggar: I mean it's amazing to think of Fraser's role in this, because at the time as Minister for Education he was a bit in the wilderness in terms of leadership in the government.

Mr March: He was, but he was wanting to do something. And, one of the big things he wanted to do was – here he was, Minister for Education, without any schools. How can you be Minister for Education when you haven't got any schools? And so, that's one of the things which prompted him to move in this direction. The other thing of course was that both New South Wales and South Australia were finding it very difficult to supply teachers to the ACT and Northern Territory, and consequently there was a bit of a teacher shortage because of that.

Mr Haggar: I understand that in the ACT teachers of executive teacher level and above were offered government houses as an incentive to come here.

Mr March: That's correct. Well, that goes back to the '60s. I remember in 1960 I was a young teacher at Lithgow High School. And, I looked at places. I'd been there nine years. I wanted to get out. So, I applied for a job, and the boss said to me 'What about this job at Lyneham High School?' I said, 'Where's that?' He said, 'It's in Canberra'. I said, 'Put it on the list'. So, I put it down. And, I came down here and I got appointed. Special secondary assistant in charge of mathematics and science.

Mr Haggar: So, that's a listed position?

Mr March: A listed position.

Mr Haggar: Executive teacher equivalent, and done on seniority once you'd got your list?

Mr March: That's right. And so, I was appointed down here, and I came down – I said 'Look, I'd better go across and have a look'. So, I came down to have a look, and I met up with Vic Armstrong, who was the secondary schools inspector in the district. And, I knew Vic, because I'd taught with him previously at Lithgow. And, Vic said 'Mick, you better stop round on Monday. Don't go home. Stop round on Monday and we'll get you a house'. I said 'What do you mean?' He said 'Well, teachers in promotion positions are

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offered houses. So, I stopped around on the Monday and I was called in by – he took me up to meet the right people, and next minute I had a house, which I never expected to get.

Mr Haggar: **I mean it's extraordinary when you think of it today, that they would provide – Canberra was so unpopular as a placement that they had to do that.**

Mr March: And, very short of teachers. It was the beginning of 1960. So, it would have been December '59 I came across, and I stopped in the Monday. And, I rang up the boss back in Lithgow and he said 'Yeah, you can have the day off'. And, so I stopped in, and a house.

Mr Haggar: **So, in terms of the creation of the colleges, it's another question about the attitude of New South Wales Teachers Federation to that. I mean you mentioned that they were committed to six-year high schools. And, I can remember in the early '80s being asked to go and speak at a New South Wales Teachers Federation meeting with parents at the Rooty Hill RSL club on the ACT college system, and the briefing I was being given by New South Wales was why it wouldn't really work in the western suburbs of Sydney.**

Mr March: Yes. Well, that's true. Because they were very much against it. I became part of this Campbell committee, which was looking at the introduction of that. We went down and we looked at – the only place where it was in Australia was down in Tasmania.

Mr Haggar: **Yeah. The Matriculation Colleges.**

Mr March: Yes. And, they had been formed for a very different reason, that they had all these tiny high school tops, senior tops, spread across the country with very small numbers, finding it very difficult. So, they decided to try and form these Matriculation Colleges.

Mr Haggar: **With a more comprehensive curriculum.**

Mr March: Comprehensive. In Hobart, Launceston and later of course in Burnie and other places. But the initial ones were in Hobart and Launceston. Went

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down, and I must confess I was quite impressed by the difference of just talking to the kids in the playground. Because if you remember, at that time, 1972, it was pretty disruptive in the system. Kids were turned off. We had the Moratorium.

Mr Haggar: **The Vietnam moratorium.**

Mr March: The moratorium marches, and all the rallies in the main street here and Melbourne, and goodness knows what. And, the kids were caught up in this. We had university students occupying - - -

Mr Haggar: **Chancelleries.**

Mr March: Yeah. Their offices, the chancellery and all that sort of stuff. And, it was disruptive. But down in Tasmania, these kids seemed to be treated normally and being accepted. So, from that point on, I was convinced. So, what we did when we came back here was – we've got to get the teachers on side. But we'd already formed this separate unit. So, one of the very earliest things we did, we called together a meeting of secondary teachers. Now, I can't remember the date of that. I think it was – we may be talking now into early '73. And, we did a plebiscite of secondary teachers. Are you in favour of the college system?

Mr Haggar: **So, you'd already taken a decision to have your own organisation and supporting the Commonwealth Teaching Service being established, and the next step was about the creation of the colleges?**

Mr March: The creation of the colleges. Right. But we had this separate union which wasn't dominated by New South Wales. So, consequently we pushed to them, and they all supported it. Well, those who were doing their thing, , we had a strong plebiscite in favour. So, from that point on, we could move towards the colleges.

Mr Haggar: **With that arrangement, the staffing for the new system had been determined before the decision to establish the colleges, but the colleges, when the decisions were made, were very favourably staffed.**

Mr March: Well, you could say that.

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Mr Haggar: I just did.

Mr March: You could say that. But they were staffed in exactly the same formula that the staff for senior years in New South Wales – took the exact staffing formula. And, that was what it cost to staff senior secondary education. But of course, the reason they were seen as being favourably staffed was (a) the ACT was already holding about 65 percent of the - - -

Mr Haggar: So, the retention rates were much higher.

Mr March: So, the retention rates here were higher than in New South Wales. So, take Campbell High School, Dickson High School and Lyneham High School. Now, their senior tops were bigger in number than you get normally. By putting all those into one place at Dickson College, you had even a bigger group. And, the other factor that occurred suddenly, 65 percent jumped to about 75, to 80 percent, because the college was so popular. So, consequently if you take the same formula and you apply it to that, you've got a bit of flexibility, which I believe - - -

Mr Haggar: Economies of scale come into play.

Mr March: Economies of scale come into play. And, consequently, I don't think we could have kicked it off unless we had those economies of scale. It's been gradually paired back since, but we were able to do things then which you couldn't do now.

Mr Haggar: Well, I started teaching at what was Phillip College in '77, and we were in a situation there of having effectively 16 hours face to face plus two hours recreational programming the registered courses, which was seen as the enrichment courses. And, every member of staff at that point in time had one or more of those courses. When I say or more, that additional component was voluntary. But the focus was very much on an academic but also cultural focus.

Mr March: Yes. We were very conscious that if you're going to suddenly shift your retention rates from 65 to 75, you're going to pull in a number of students who were not necessarily tertiary oriented. So, you had to provide a reasonable course, registered programs and things to keep them going.

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Mr Haggar: **So, you're saying that the initial registered course program was designed to not occupy, but to develop that particular additional non-tertiary orientated component?**

Mr March: One of the prime proponents of that was Dick Johnson, Professor Richard St Clair Johnson, who at that time was in charge of the admissions – he was head of the Admissions Committee at the ANU. And, he maintained that when you're educating at a secondary education level, it didn't matter much what you learnt, as long as you learnt a breadth of subjects, but some of the subjects you learnt in depth. So, he said you don't have to learn everything in depth. He said you have to have some courses that kids can do, like typing and driver education and things like that they're interested in, and you'll capture their interest and keep them occupied and give them things to do, and have useful outcomes, but it doesn't have to all be tied down to tertiary preparation.

Mr Haggar: **And, in fact by taking a proportion of the units of study to count for your tertiary preparation, the 18 out of 30 units, meant that that philosophical approach was capable of being implemented.**

Mr March: Yes. It was. Because you could say okay, a student can still stay to do his 30 units, which is five courses, but not every one of those is going to be counted as part of – he can pick his best three courses or three and a bit courses, and we'll assess him on those. And, of course the actual assessment is – as you probably well know – highly distorted. You've been a teacher. Most tests and examinations and questions you asked kids, you mark it out of five or ten. Right? If you mark it out of ten, you can probably distinguish those sort of grades. But when you aggregate those grades to have them out of 100 and then you try and re-estimate those in terms of academic progress and other things and you come out with a tertiary entrance score based on 100 point scale to two decimal places, it's bloody meaningless Clive. But that's what we had to produce.

Mr Haggar: **And, of course you're sitting there with your standard deviation, you're sitting there with a moderating device of the then Australian scholastic aptitude test.**

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Mr March: As it was then. But nevertheless, that still gave basically a fairly valid method of putting people together. But it's nowhere near the level of accuracy that's claimed. But anyway, that's the way it is.

Mr Haggar: I think I'm on top of the issues with that, given my own children's experience with it. So, I'm just thinking back in terms of the union's development of an approach to that internal assessment mechanism, progressive assessment as opposed to the high school certificate, high stakes.

Mr March: Yes. Well, when the authority was formed, we formed two or three working committees. Standing committees, we called them in those days. The curriculum committee, the staffing committee, the buildings committee. Now, I was chairman of the curriculum committee and chairman of the buildings committee and a few things like that.

Mr Haggar: Did you get any support or time release for that?

Mr March: Well, we got an extra teacher.

Mr Haggar: Okay. So, there was some degree of – that's as a Vice President of the union being on the authority?

Mr March: On the authority. There was an extra teacher attached to the staff of the three schools where this happened. And so, that gave us a bit of flexibility. But this was still pretty time consuming, running around managing those - - -

Mr Haggar: And, in fact the teachers, the secondary teachers who were producing the curriculum for the new colleges, which were to open in '76, were doing that in their own time effectively.

Mr March: Well, yes and no. Because we had a three-pronged approach to that. We had what we called the instructional design program, and we – I forget the number of committees we formed, but we were able – there was sufficient – sorry. I should mention one other factor Clive. One of the brilliant things that Jock Weeden did was to recognise that to get teachers he'd have to have a margin.

Mr Haggar: This is the famous five percent salary - - -

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Mr March: The famous five percent salary raise. It only lasted a year or two, because of all the interstate jealousies. But he introduced it, and it produced a swag of teachers coming to the ACT, and we had a wave of teachers. We went from a shortage of teachers to an abundance of teachers.

Mr Haggar: There was also in '75 the impact of Cyclone Tracey on the Northern Territory teachers wasn't there?

Mr March: Well, that's true. That was late in that period. We appointed Hedley as chief education officer during '75. The actual Cyclone Tracey was at the end of '75. December '75.

Mr Haggar: December '74.

Mr March: December '74. Right. December '74. Hedley would have been appointed in '74, because he began duty in '75. Took up his duty. So, it was sort of a double shift. Hedley was coming anyway. Suddenly most of his staff were down here as well.

Mr Haggar: So, he came from the Northern Territory?

Mr March: At that stage he was chief education officer in the Northern Territory.

Mr Haggar: I wasn't aware of that.

Mr March: I remember reading his application. I applied to be chairman of the chief education officer selection panel— of the two newest services, because I was on the committee. So, he was appointed, and he proved to be a very good appointment, in that he was very quickly on side, and he made it his business of learning what we were on about in the ACT so that he could be part of it.

Mr Haggar: Well, when you think of it as – and Mal Lee has waxed lyrical on this in terms of a major educational innovation, complete restructure, and it stood the time. It's four decades on. Just taking you back for a moment to that separation, I mean we've brought the Secondary Teachers Association and the Primary Teachers Association together as a single entity over time with the new union. The high schools were – we talked

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about why the colleges had some advantages in terms of resources, but we didn't address the high schools and the primary schools.

Mr March: The high schools were still being staffed on the same sort of basis, but unfortunately the high schools didn't seem to have the same sort of thrust from the senior principals in the system.

Mr Haggar: So, it's been put to me that people were focused on the creation of a new system of colleges and didn't realise that at the same time they were establishing a new system of high schools.

Mr March: Of high schools. That's correct. And, the other thing was that with the establishment of the Commonwealth Teaching Service and formalised in 1974, teachers had to make up their mind whether they're going to stay with New South Wales or whether they're going to come to the ACT. Cutler was the Minister for Education in New South Wales, and he signed an agreement I think with Fraser at the time of the breakaway, that teachers would not be disadvantaged in the makeover, and the conditions would be automatic, backwards and forwards, which it pretty well did too.

But a lot of the teachers who were senior members of the teaching profession, principals and deputy principals in high schools and that, were moderately senior, because Canberra had become over the years a bit of an elephant's graveyard for people who did their service in New South Wales and came to retire in the ACT.

Mr Haggar: As opposed to down the coast?

Mr March: That's right. It was a good place to come to. You got a house etcetera, and you were away. Which meant there were a number of people who had a lot of superannuation tied up in New South Wales, and they made the decision to stay with New South Wales. So, a lot of that expertise left the ACT, people like Roy Wheeler and - - -

Mr Haggar: Roy Wheeler comes to mind constantly in relation to this.

Mr March: Who I reckon would have been an absolute ideal player in the local scene.

Mr Haggar: He became principal of Moruya High School.

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Mr March: That's right. There's a number of others I could mention. But a lot of that expertise left. Part of the movement to form the separate ACT system was because the local members of the P&C were a bit sick of this elephant graveyard part. And so, some young principals had been brought in, people like Arthur Judd etcetera. But they didn't seem to take up the thrust of pushing for high schools. Now, looking from the top, I thought it was absolutely ideal that we'd structure it so that at the senior secondary level we'd have to have some sort of protective body to protect us, and that's why we formed the Schools Accrediting Agency. We formed the Schools Accrediting Agency because we needed some sort of guarantor stamp of approval.

Mr Haggar: This is of course now the Board of Senior Secondary Studies.

Mr March: Now it's become the Board of Senior Secondary Studies. We deliberately made it an agency of the Authority, so that what we were doing in the Authority the bloody board couldn't override, because we wanted these secondary colleges to work. So, we said okay, we've got this. It was not a representative body. It's an agency of the Authority. And, we appointed Dick Johnson, because Dick had been on side all along. Stuart Houston, he was the Vice Chancellor at the CCAE. And, I forget who the others were. Anyway, but we also had – I was on that committee as well trying to keep control so that we knew what they were doing. As I say, I was chairman of the Curriculum Committee in the Agency. Because we wanted the thing to go so it would work.

Now, after it got established, we could then become representative. But you couldn't have a totally separate representative body trying to plan something new for colleges if all the colleges hadn't even been formulated. We had to give a – now that caused a bit of strife. But you had to keep your finger on what was going on at the time, so that what happened was what was planned to happen and, suddenly somebody did not come in from West Wyalong or somewhere with some funny idea to it and bugged up the whole show.

I remember thinking about this Agency. At that stage, colleges of advanced education had accrediting committees, and the TAFE system was going the

same way. Because I was on the Technical and Further Education Accreditation Committees, and this seemed to be the way to go. You had a body there which was a respectable enough body, and you could accredit the courses and get them fully structured, therefore we could do something. That gave us the protection that we needed. But then later on, you could broaden the thing because you'd established all the patterns, you'd set the procedures, and it could work.

Mr Haggar: **And, a key for that point of time would have been the university's recognition of the qualification.**

Mr March: Yes. We were very fortunate there, because the ANU had introduced an early entrance system. You might have been at school at the time.

Mr Haggar: **My first year at ANU was '71.**

Mr March: So, they introduced an early entrance system, the main purpose of which I believe was so they could advertise across Australia and offer early entries and pick the eyes out of students to enrich their course. Well, I think Dick Johnson did admit that was partly - - -

Mr Haggar: **Their national under-graduate scholarships - - -**

Mr March: That's right, NUAUS.

Mr Haggar: **That's why Declan King for example came from Tasmania.**

Mr March: That's right. They brought in people, and they got good people. So, that system was there, and consequently, because they were accepting students on principals' recommendations, they were quite prepared to listen to this alternate structure. And, there were people like Richard Campbell, who was strongly supportive of it, and Alan Barnard and others within the structure. And so, consequently we had a body there. But I remember one of the first meetings of the Early Curriculum Committee, I remember thinking that Bill Radford was running ACER at the time. So, went down to Melbourne, fronted up with Radford, and he said 'Well, you've got to make your own decisions'.

Mr Haggar: **Helpful.**

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- Mr March: And, he wouldn't commit himself. However, he did commit himself. If we went into the system for calculating scores etcetera, we could have John Keyes as a statistician to help - - -
- Mr Haggar: As an advisor?**
- Mr March: As an advisor.
- Mr Haggar: So, what position did Radford hold at this time?**
- Mr March: Radford was the Chairman of the Australian Council of Education Research, ACER. He was Chairman of that. And, John Keyes was one of his statisticians. And so, we got John Keyes. He was another member that we pushed on to the Accrediting Agency. So, as I say, they weren't representatives as such. They were selected people we invited to come and be members of the Agency.
- Mr Haggar: But when you're saying this as we, you're in this role because you are a member of the Interim Authority or the Authority at that stage?**
- Mr March: No. Still the Interim Authority.
- Mr Haggar: Still the Interim Authority. As the secondary college principal on various committees, and still as a Vice President of the ACT Teachers Federation?**
- Mr March: That's correct.
- Mr Haggar: Extraordinary breadth of responsibility.**
- Mr March: Well, most of the time. We were a bit busy, but nevertheless, it enabled me to keep an eye on what was happening and help with the planning.
- Mr Haggar: I mean the early years of the Federation, I've been told the executive meetings often went until very, very late at night on a weekly basis.**
- Mr March: That's correct. That's correct. That was another thing. When I was in England on the Churchill Fellowship, I met up with this idea over there for using their disused schools with a declining enrolment, and Canberra High School was in this position at the time, and there was empty space. So, the

thing that they did, they established teaching resources centres, but they were also clever enough to know that if you gave free rent to the Teacher Federation or the Teachers Union, they would come and establish their offices there and you'd have cohesion between the two. So, that's what we introduced at the Canberra High School.

Mr Haggar: **Old Canberra High School.**

Mr March: The old Canberra High School. Barry Price was appointed first Director of the teaching resources centre.

Mr Haggar: **That's right. Teaching resources centre, which is now the O'Connell Education Centre. So, from your point of view, anything that reinforced the connection between teachers and professional status was significant?**

Mr March: Yes. Yes. We wanted teachers who knew what they were on about. We wanted them to take a part in things. At the time I believed that the only thing worthwhile was the push of the union movement etcetera, like that.

Mr Haggar: **That's an interesting perspective, because that requires a certain degree of organisation that I'm not sure was evident in those years.**

Mr March: No. A lot of it was very informal. A lot of it was very informal. For example, the colleges introducing that educational design program, where we pulled teachers out of the schools and brought them in. And, we had relief teachers to put in behind them that were brought in for a week. So, we got input of syllabuses from New South Wales, Queensland, etcetera, all the states, England, Oxford program, and we finished up with the International Baccalaureate]. These are the ideas that you don't have to be stuck with what you've thought forever. These are new ideas. Now, we're going to need staff in the colleges, and we're going to get you to look at these courses, and then you can go outside and you can form your committees and you can write courses. And, the condition we made was that – this was important for the two transitional colleges, Dickson and Narrabundah – that the teachers in those colleges could retain their positions provided there was a course which they could teach.

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Mr Haggar: **So, it was in their interest to actually - - -**

Mr March: In their interest to write the bloody courses. And, it was also in the interests of people in the high schools to get on to these committees too. Because I was also at the time President of the Canberra Mathematics Association, and I knew that the thrust of teachers interested in subject associations, maths associations, history teachers associations, science teachers associations – which had also helped start up back in the '60s – they were interested in education, and they were genuinely interested in education. Going back to Jock Weeden's five percent margin, they were given an excuse to work a bit harder, and it was very important.

Mr Haggar: **I think I've followed and been involved in the history of the margin, and its various iterations.**

Mr March: It didn't last long.

Mr Haggar: **One of the reflections that I've got on this is that whilst there were activist women like Margaret Dempster, Julie Biles, the early years of the organisation really didn't have women teachers or principals. Well (a) we didn't have any women secondary principals. But bringing a much more modern focus to it, issues of gender?**

Mr March: They were pretty grim. Just going back to Narrabundah, I had Dianne Mildern, who was head of my social science department, Jim Pinson, who'd been a science master, and I had – but when he left and went back to New South Wales, I appointed – I can't think of her name.

Mr Haggar: **It was quite a while ago.**

Mr March: I would have seen her three days ago. Lois Perry. Lois Perry. I appointed her as a science master. I tried to get some senior women going. As a matter of fact, I selected Dianne Mildern as my first deputy, because in those days the selection processes weren't quite as tight. The principals had a lot of say. To get this thing going, we had to get people who could work. But Dianne Mildern decided to work into the school's office, and then she went off into the Department of Education. So, we tried to push the women in, but there weren't a lot of women about to be pushed.

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- Mr Haggar:** **Well, they would have automatically been handicapped by the New South Wales seniority arrangements.**
- Mr March: Yes. They wouldn't have got jobs any other way.
- Mr Haggar:** **But I mean eligibility was an interesting one, because of course it was "peer assessment" to get your eligibility and then selection.**
- Mr March: That was one of their big failures, I think. I believe that peer assessment is the way to go, and that your peers would assess you fairly. What I didn't realise was that there'd be a lot of fiddling with it from the ground, that some principals will say 'Why can you put him up and I can't put him up?' I believe there was a lot of fiddling with the system, which they were not genuine. Well, I don't know. That's my opinion.
- Mr Haggar:** **Well, it's a debate that runs right through 'til the '90s, and in that process eligibility is ditched because it's seen as something stopping women getting a promotion. You then have the formation of the full-time peer assessment group, which was a selection of classroom teachers, executive teachers, headed by a principal and deputies leading the teams. But then that dies as well in the '90s, and we operate with a system where principals are largely the chair now of the exercise.**
- Mr March: Another big failure that I think that we got wrong was the master teachers. Because that became a farce, because teachers could be appointed as a master teacher say in Phillip College, and they immediately apply for a job in Hawker College or somewhere else. Now, they were appointed as a master teacher because of the influence they had as an ordinary classroom teacher in the structures they're working within. They go off to this other college, which is totally different from what they're doing, and most of them didn't work. The transfers didn't work.
- Mr Haggar:** **I have a personal view that we lost the first iteration of master teachers because they didn't have a defined duty statement. It was a position that just recognised them for what they did on a daily basis rather than having the opportunity to extract from their high level of skill leadership roles. And, some places they did have that, but in other**

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places they weren't identifiable as master teachers in the role that they took on.

Mr March: Yes. I have teachers getting a promotion to Narrabundah as a master teacher into a structure that they couldn't operate, because it's so different from what they'd come from when they were exercising their abilities. And so, we couldn't use them in that sort of way, which was a pity. Because the master teacher concept was, I believe, quite a good one, in that not everybody should have to go on and give up teaching. They should be rewarded in some way that they're a very good teacher, if they can stay and do what they're doing.

Mr Haggar: And, of course subsequently we had the advance skills teacher regime, which was nationally introduced with a very, very high rate of success. It ultimately wrote its own death warrant as a system.

Mr March: It's difficult, because there really is a point in recognising those teachers whose actual teaching ability is vastly superior to others, but sometimes it's a contextual system. If you transfer them into a different context, it doesn't work.

Mr Haggar: What was your view about the contentious issue of mobility?

Mr March: Well, I believe, I must confess, that if you wanted to get the school to work, you had to keep the staff together, and you had to build a staff which was coherent and accepting of the structures of the school. The unfortunate thing was that the colleges took off and were successful, and were seen as successful, and consequently people wanted to move into them and abandon the high schools, which was unfortunate for the high schools. Because as I said earlier, I believe that the high schools had a structure for developing the system.

I mean it's a three-level structure. At the college level there was this formalisation which gave it the protection which was needed because of the external examination system that we had to compete with. At the high school level, that wasn't there. But that should be managed by the group of principals who were running the school. They should be able to control that and keep that in a sort of respectable way. At the primary level, that should

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be far more even and open as to what they did. But the high schools didn't ever really pick that up. And I think that's unfortunate.

Mr Haggar: **And, of course we eventually abandoned the Year 10 certificate as well.**

Mr March: Yes, that's right. And, it's gone, so what happens there could be anybody's business. And, there's some very good high schools, but there's some that are not so good.

Mr Haggar: **Just getting back to the circumstances with the union and its development, I mean from the perspective of a very senior principal in the system, how did you perceive, particularly after you left the Vice Presidency – you're working systemically, you've got relations with the other college principals in particular, and through the Secondary Principals Association as well. How did you perceive the effectiveness of the union's operation say through the '80s and '90s?**

Mr March: Well, basically I was never a member of – yeah, I was for a short time. I was still a member of the permanent Authority, but only until the end of the year when I resigned in '77. Because I believed that having set up and structured the thing, if it's going to work on a representative basis, somebody else has got to be able to come in and take the role that I've been doing. As I probably indicated, I felt that I had a considerable influence within the system as to what was happening, and I was able to keep my finger on a lot of the things. I think if those things are going to be any good to last, they've got to be something somebody else could take up and do. So, that's why I left the system in '77, at the end of '77.

Mr Haggar: **When you say left the system, you mean left that particular - - -**

Mr March: I left the position. I resigned as Vice President and then consequently gave up my position on the Schools Authority. I think Ian Alder took over I think at that stage. I believe that at that stage there should be – if we're going to talk about representative work, it can't be just one person doing it all the time. If you can't hang on to it, you've got to pass it on. So, I did. I kind of regretted that I lost a bit of this and a bit of that, but I got into something else. I think I wrote a thesis and did a masters and, did a PhD and things like that.

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So, the actual role of the secondary principals, that was interesting, but it didn't have the same sort of clout I think as – but it did allow us to keep together, and the fact that the college principals – they were still working randomly with the Agency, which was still an agency at that stage, eventually became the Board of Secondary Studies, and they kept up that business of keeping the college principals closely attired with the board as such. And, that seemed to be one of the few things – that's a thing that really flowed on and remained effective. (a) we set it up as a select committee, (b) we then allowed it to become representative, and (c) it then became completely independent and structural. And, therefore I think it's retained its credibility. But nevertheless, it's kept its very close association between the schools and the board.

Mr Haggar: **Between the managers of the system.**

Mr March: Yeah. And, I must confess that I always thought the Schools Office should be more a server to the school than a dominant.

Mr Haggar: **It's interesting that over the years on a regular basis there's been pressure on principals not to be members of the Teachers Federation and the AEU, which has in some other states created real issues, but it's never really seriously been a problem here.**

Mr March: No. It wasn't. Some of the principal movers were in fact Vice Presidents of the union. That's how they got into it. And, the whole thing was structured around what the union was wanting was very similar to what the professional teaching subject associations were wanting, and consequently that was going to fulfil the requirements of what was best for the kids. And so, that's why I believe it's probably stayed that way to this day.

Mr Haggar: **Well, from my perspective, I always used to say that the union was the paramount professional organisation as well as industrial, and we always had very good relations with the principals.**

Mr March: Yes. I think that's necessary. But of course, you get ratbags in the union. You get ratbags in the principals. And, you'll make mistakes and appoint people that you think Christ, I don't know - - -

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Mr Haggar: **Okay. Look, I'm very conscious that you've been very generous with your time, and if it's okay with you now, I'll bring the discussion to a close. Thank you very much Mick. It's been really appreciated.**

Mr March: You're welcome.

[End of Transcript]