

Science made of timetabler's art



Timetable software specialist Edval has partnered with the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals to offer its timetabling system to Victorian state schools in 2013. For MD Catherine Elliot-Jones, the agreement means a high frequency travel schedule from her home base in Mt Gambier SA, but she says that demonstrating the timetabling system at schools across the state is one of the most enjoyable parts of her role.

"We are in a hectic period just now, with a significant number of Victorian schools signed up to start using Edval to plan their 2013 timetables and more to follow as the year progresses," she told *Education Today*.

Edval is widely used in NSW state schools, by private schools and by the NSW Board of Studies to schedule state exams. It is the recommended timetabling package for all CESA schools (Catholic Education SA)... and a growing number of Irish schools after one of them "just found us!"

A UK trained teacher, Elliot-Jones moved to Australia in 1999 and worked at Tenison Woods College initially as a science teacher, then as Science Coordinator and finally as both timetabler and Senior School Learning and Wellbeing Coordinator.

She told *Education Today*: "When I arrived at the school, the community was still recovering from the death of a much loved deputy principal. He was also the timetabler and with his passing, much of the 'knowledge' of the running of the school had been lost."

Assigned the crucial timetabler role, she had the opportunity to evaluate software systems and effectively to start with a blank page.

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"One of my criteria was to find software that would store the school's valuable knowledge in a form that would not be lost and could grow and evolve. I found what I was looking for in Edval.

"The Edval system does not simply give a snapshot of what currently works in a school but all other possibilities. The fact that it does this enables the algorithms to work on all of the data to get the best possible timetable with minimal changes to the ideal staffing."

Like Victor Kiam, who said, famously, in 1980s Remington TV ads: "I liked the shaver so much I bought the company," Cathy Elliot-Jones left teaching to join Edval in 2007.

"The effect [of using Edval] on my school had been amazing; suddenly the timetable was being driven by student need and curriculum need rather than the other way around. I thought all schools should benefit from this, so I joined the company to make it happen."

George Salem, Deputy Principal of Francis Greenway High School, an 830-student co-ed in Beresfield, NSW, says: "Edval works like a timetabler thinks and works, it's all very logical."

He turned to Edval when, on the last day of Term 4 December 2010, the timetable crashed, leaving the school with a crisis and very little time to resolve it.

"Once we had entered all of the data into Edval, it took just two days to create a timetable for Term 1 2011," he says.

"The most powerful feature is auto populate, when you make a change, everything updates – children, rooms, teachers. And it also saves money, we paid for 28 release days last year and none this year so that's around \$4000 we haven't had to spend."

Also in Sydney, George Harb Assistant Headmaster at St Patrick's College Strathfield, who doubles as timetabler, chose Edval when he was appointed in 2009. "It's absolutely user friendly and the people at Edval are so accommodating... often, an email question will be answered within five to 10 minutes."

In Melbourne, Pitsa Binnion, Principal of McKinnon Secondary College is another satisfied user. She says: "With 1660 students in Years 7–12, our timetable is very complex. Our timetabler, Diana Hatch, raves about the system."

Edval

Plans and manages the core needs of the school – generate a timetable; elective lines; playground duty; study classes; class list management; teacher timetables; student timetables; room timetables; spread management etc.

EdvalDaily

The day-to-day school organiser: manage absent teachers within seconds, cover excursions, merge classes (saving the cost of a cover teacher). This module will also set up exam timetables and organise the supervision roster, room swaps etc.

EdvalStaff

Find rooms, teachers, students on any given day at any particular time. This module communicates with both EdvalDaily and Edval so daily changes are visible. Multi-user room bookings and class list management are included.

WebChoice

Enables students to enter elective choices via the web by a specific date, according to rules and a pattern determined by the school. Preference data is available online to administrators at any time and can be downloaded directly to Edval.

EdvalPTN

Online parent teacher interview scheduling benefits students, teachers and parents by scheduling meeting times and venues efficiently

EdvalRollCall

The web and network based roll marking system is integrated with timetable and daily changes. It's always accurate, always live and can be access anywhere

