



AEU-ACT response to

Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges: Themes for further discussion

The AEU welcomes the opportunity to respond to the themes for further discussion in relation to Phase 2 of the DET consultation on *Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges*.

The AEU supports the key themes in principle and acknowledges these were ideas that gained consistent support in submissions received by DET.

The AEU represents over 3000 teachers, principals and education support staff. We provided a detailed submission to DET in response to the *Consultation Paper on Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges*. The recommendations contained in our earlier submission represent the AEU-ACT Branch's long-term vision for a sustainable, high quality ACT public education system. We request that our earlier submission be read in conjunction with this paper.

In this response we will discuss the important role of public education in supporting equitable outcomes and being genuinely accessible to all students. The AEU will also propose some additional actions under each of the themes which we believe complement those proposed by DET.

Any recommendations to the ACT Minister for Education resulting from the DET High School and College Review must have the principles of equity and diversity at their heart.

Equity of Outcomes

The achievement of high quality education outcomes for every student requires recognition of the need for targeted programs and the associated investment involved in educating children from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances.

Factors such as family income, Indigeneity, language background, disabilities and special needs, and other socio-economic and cultural factors have an impact on the educational needs and outcomes of students, and thus of schools and sectors.

While the key themes provide some broad brush strokes, there is a need for DET to ensure that any strategy considers the particular needs of disadvantaged students.

Students from high SES families, for example, have much higher education outcomes than students from low SES families, while non-Indigenous students achieve much higher education outcomes than Indigenous students.

As stated in the AEU's submission in response to *Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges: Discussion Paper*, Australia's public schools educate the majority of students who are recognised to have particular educational needs, and there are large gaps in outcomes between many students in these groups:

Low SES Students

Independent researcher Barbara Preston's extensive analysis of the 2006 Census data shows that the public sector's declining share of the enrolments has been accompanied by an increasing concentration of low SES students and an increasing concentration of high SES students in the Catholic and Independent sectors. 46% of students from high income families attend public secondary schools, while three-quarters of low income families with secondary school children enrol them in public schools.

In secondary education, Preston's analysis of the income background of Indigenous students also shows that public schools educate 90% of low income Indigenous secondary students compared to 70% of high income Indigenous secondary students. Catholic schools educate just 10% of all Indigenous secondary students, but 20% of high income Indigenous secondary students attend Catholic schools. Only 6% of all Indigenous secondary students attend other private schools, although they enrol 10% of high income Indigenous secondary students. The pattern is similar at the primary level.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

ABS data (2009) shows that 80.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attended ACT public schools.

Students with Disabilities and Special Needs

Productivity Commission data (2008) shows that 80% of students with disabilities and special needs attended ACT public schools.

Students with Language Background Other than English [LBOTE]

ABS Census data (2006) and the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services* shows that the majority of students with language backgrounds other than English are enrolled in public schools. In the ACT this figure is 60.3%.

New Arrivals and ESL Students

National 2002-2006 enrolment data for the ESL New Arrivals Program provided by DEST in 2007 shows that 91.1% of these students are enrolled in public schools. In the ACT, public schools educate 100% of ESL New Arrivals students. ESL students represent 11% of the public school enrolments (2009).

'Students at Risk'

Education economist and policy analyst Adam Rorris' analysis of 'Students at Risk' data from 2006 showed that 78% of students defined as being 'at risk' by the MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce are enrolled in public schools. The skewed nature of educational disadvantage correlates with the higher proportion of students from low SES backgrounds in public schools. The fact that nearly 80% of

the students 'at risk' can be found in public schools provides a clear signal to governments as to where the real high priority funding needs can be found.

National convenor of Save Our Schools Trevor Cobbold states the most recent report on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 15 year olds shows that education standards in the ACT are declining and inequity is increasing. Shamefully, the achievement gap between students from low and high socio-economic status families in the ACT is the biggest in Australia.

Governments must acknowledge the role of public schools in educating a disproportionate share of students with particular needs and the factors which increase the costs of providing high quality for all students.

It is vital that the High School and College Review result in an investigation by DET to identify the inequities which currently exist within ACT education and develop targeted strategies and programs to overcome the disparity in outcomes for a diverse range of students.

Key Themes:

The AEU will make comments in relation to some of the key themes (in Times New Roman) and propose further dot points (*in Arial italics*), as follows:

1. Improve the provision of vocational education and training in high schools and colleges (years 9 -12) through:
 - developing an ACT plan for the provision of VET in schools which is responsive to the emerging opportunities in the Territory and the nation, and provides clear articulation to tertiary education and employment

The AEU recommends that all VET provision across the ACT be mapped, that any duplication be removed and that all schools work collaboratively rather than competitively to provide high quality VET provision.

 - increased access for students in years 9 -12 to CIT courses, facilities and expertise, training providers and universities
 - increased partnerships with industry, business and community bodies.

The AEU recommends the following additional actions under this theme:

- *Introducing guidelines for principals, industry and business to support ethical partnerships with schools for the benefit of students*
- *Making DET the single Registered Training Organisation for all VET courses provided in ACT public high schools and colleges*
- *Ensuring that workplace assessments comply with Australian Qualifications Framework requirements*
- *Addressing the workforce issues for VET in schools and CIT teachers (workload, qualifications, multi-sector employment, resources, professional development) to remove the barriers to recruiting and retaining high quality teachers for VET in schools and CIT*
- *Supporting all teachers of VET to obtain the appropriate Certificate IV Training and Assessment qualifications as a minimum, then progressing through a Diploma to an Advanced Diploma in Vocational Education and Training*

2. Enhance the quality of career education and counselling in high schools and colleges, by
- Coordinating and aligning current career advice provision in schools and tertiary institutions

The AEU recommends that career counselling be provided for all students from at least Year 9.

- providing targeted professional learning to school staff involved in career education, including continued access to the Certificate IV in Careers Advice
- expanding the roles of industry and employer stakeholders in the provision of career advice and information to students

Industry and employer stakeholders would need further training and support to carry out an expanded role and duty of care issues need to be resolved.

- investigating the development of a portal to provide access to career advice and counselling for young people and adults in partnership with CIT and universities.

The AEU notes that the development of an information portal (on career advice, education options and support services) is one of the recommendations of the Tertiary Education Taskforce.

3. Consider the development of a comprehensive curriculum and assessment body (P–12) to
- develop rigorous and coherent curriculum provision for P – 12
 - ensure consistency of achievement standards across schools

The AEU recommends that DET support teachers to differentiate the new Australian Curriculum to meet the needs of particular students, for example, students with a disability and ESL students. This must be done in the context of the current curriculum frameworks, Every Chance to Learn and the Early Years Learning Framework.

The AEU recommends that DET provide appropriate support to those teachers already in service who are requested to teach outside their area of training/expertise due to teacher shortages. These teachers require additional qualifications, professional learning or other support in order to ensure high standards in pedagogy and curriculum are maintained.

- review certification requirements to allow more flexible models of engagement, particularly in years 11 and 12, including accelerated pathways
- provide rigorous, standards-based year 12 certification which encompasses essential learnings and vocational outcomes
- review the purpose and relevance of the year 10 certificate
- consider the development of community service opportunities to contribute to high school and college graduation

The AEU recommends that work-based learning/employment outcomes contribute to high school and college graduation.

- improve collaboration and partnerships between government and non-government schools

The AEU wishes to reiterate that before considering partnerships between private and public school, the public education system should focus its attention on the development of public school partnerships/collegiates across the same sector i.e. high school–high school, as well as across sectors ie. primary school-high school.

In considering public-private school partnerships, it must be acknowledged that the public-private divide will continue to exist while resource distribution remains so inequitable, and while private schools can impose restrictions on enrolments. This funding inequity for public schools remains entrenched, partly due to the current unfair Commonwealth school funding model. The AEU has welcomed the national review of schools funding. Any consideration of public-private school partnerships in the ACT would need to consider how they would support improved student outcomes as well as the funding, resource and enrolment implications for public education. Any partnerships must be agreed by all stakeholders.

4. Develop local area education plans that offer clear learning pathways to students from the pre-primary and primary years, into high school and college, and on to tertiary education and training. This could include:
 - consideration of guaranteed entry to particular schools within a local area
The AEU supports the principle that every child has the right to access a public school in their local area; however the AEU recognises that complications arise when the capacity of a school is reached and DET cannot guarantee entry in this circumstance.
 - improved transition planning as students move from one educational setting to another
 - ensuring continued curriculum access in areas such as languages
 - groups of schools working as federations to pool their resources to ensure a broad curriculum offering to all their students
The AEU recommends central support to facilitate schools working in clusters and assist with coordination.
 - enhanced use of information management systems to ensure appropriate data transfer as students progress through the public school system and beyond.
The AEU recommends DET review, and if necessary enhance the protocols for the protection of student data.

The AEU recommends the following additional actions under this theme:

 - *Providing teachers with additional release time to offer more support to students and families such as student pathways, student transitions pastoral care and parental involvement.*
 - *Resourcing the ongoing, long-term implementation of the Quality Teaching model in public schools through the provision of adequate support and professional development.*
5. Develop a system-wide plan for the provision of specialist programs for students with particular talents or interests in areas such as:
 - Maths/Science
 - Technology
 - Arts
 - Languages
 - PE /Sport

Schools or clusters of schools could offer differentiated and enriched learning programs in specified areas to complement their comprehensive curriculum, with delivery from specialist teachers, external experts, national institutions and the use of ICT.

The AEU recommends that in order to enable students to access a regional specialist program at another school, the barriers, such as transport issues and differing school timetables, must be addressed.

6. Support high school students with exceptional abilities through the development of a Virtual Learning Academy for Gifted Education. The Academy will use the Department's *connected Learning community* (cLc) to provide access for students in every high school to challenging programs within the context of their mainstream education.

The AEU recommends that gifted and talented programs be delivered in a range of ways to recognise that students learn in a variety of ways. The cLc is just one tool to enhance learning for all students and therefore it must offer challenging learning opportunities for all students.

7. Develop system and network strategies to ensure effective learning pathways and environments for disadvantaged students and disengaged and disaffected youth including:
 - the development of enhanced and sustainable partnership arrangements between DET and other government agencies
 - the development of an expert referral group to assist schools in the identification of special needs of students

The AEU recommends that this reference group also provide support and resources to assist schools in addressing the special needs of students.

- identification and development of appropriate alternative settings and programs such as community-based flexible learning centres providing full service programs.

The AEU recommends that DET identify and address the barriers which exist in preventing some students from gaining equitable access to an education.

The AEU recommends the following additional action under this theme:

- *Development of a long-term strategy to recruit and retain School Counsellors in ACT DET in order to meet the increasingly complex needs of students.*

8. Support a series of pilots in schools or clusters to consider more flexible learning opportunities and structures including:
 - opportunities for some year 10 students to move into the college sector
 - some schools having more flexible timetables and hours of opening
 - single sex classes

The AEU recommends that DET undertake a careful analysis of the reasons for and possible effects of any grouping to establish if there is any educational benefit for students in expanding upon the current single-sex class provision either on a temporary or permanent basis. The AEU believes that other measures can be taken to address gender and the particular needs of (some) girls and (some) boys, with careful consideration for the influence of culture, language background, family income and disability. For example, ensuring all students can access all curriculum areas including VET programs and promotion of 'non-traditional' course choices for boys and girls.

- increased partnerships with the community, including the use of schools as multifunctional centres and community hubs.

In response to the general proposal around pilot programs, the AEU makes the following observations:

- a) *Pilot programs in schools can be confusing for parents choosing a school, give the impression of instability and experimentation and can cause a disruption for students.*
- b) *The AEU expects that any pilot programs will be negotiated and agreed, in accordance with the Enterprise Agreement, between the AEU and DET prior to implementation as there are significant implications in relation to employees' working conditions.*

9. Enhance the confidence of parents and the broader community in the public school system by:

- o enhancing the role of parents in secondary schooling through increasing their involvement in school processes and decision-making regarding their child's progress
- o the introduction of school uniforms to reinforce school identity and school pride

The introduction of school uniforms are a school-based decision which the staff and school board must support. If it is agreed to introduce or mandate school uniforms, teachers must be adequately supported by the principal and parents to implement a school uniform policy.

- o the introduction of mandatory exit surveys on each school database to acknowledge parent opinion and support future decision making for individual schools.

Mandatory exit surveys are a good idea and should be expanded to compulsory exit surveys of staff leaving DET as well. However, much has to be done to address issues prior to the point when families and staff choose to leave public education. Action must be taken by DET to prevent this exodus.

The major reason why parents move their child/ren to private education is the under-resourcing of public schools whilst there is significant Commonwealth spending on non-government schools. This must be addressed by governments. Investment in people, programs and further capital works is needed.

The AEU recommends the following additional actions under this theme:

- o *Standardise organisational models for high schools and colleges within ACT public education to make them more consistent across the system, i.e. Year 7-10 and Year 11-12. The wide variety of models in our small system (Year 7-12, Year 6-10, P-10 etc) is confusing for parents choosing a school, gives the impression of instability and experimentation, and causes a disruption in transitions for students. Still allows for flexibility within school structures.*
- o *Review school policies to ensure that the school environment, structures and procedures genuinely provide a safe environment for all.*
- o *Widely promote all the outstanding educational programs offered by the ACT public school system, promoting the positives of public education.*
- o *Actively combat the myths that are perpetuated about the public school sector.*

The ACT government must provide adequate recurrent funding to effectively implement the recommendations from both the High School and College Review and the Tertiary Education Taskforce.

In conclusion, *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* provides a blueprint for all school systems as well as all schools to aspire to.

“Australian governments, in collaboration with all school sectors, commit to promoting equity and excellence in Australian schooling. This means that all Australian governments and all school sectors must:

- provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location
- ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process, including to promote high expectations for the learning outcomes of Indigenous students
- ensure that the learning outcomes of Indigenous students improve to match those of other students
- ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes
- reduce the effect of other sources of disadvantage, such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness
- ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity
- encourage parents, carers, families, the broader community and young people themselves to hold high expectations for their educational outcomes
- promote a culture of excellence in all schools, by supporting them to provide challenging, and stimulating learning experiences and opportunities that enable all students to explore and build on their gifts and talents
- promote personalised learning that aims to fulfil the diverse capabilities of each young Australian.”

Penny Gilmour

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