



**AEU Submission in response to  
*Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges: Discussion Paper***

The Australian Education Union–ACT Branch (AEU) is the peak professional and industrial organisation for over 3000 principals, teachers and school support staff in ACT public schools and TAFE.

The AEU welcomes the opportunity to put forward its vision for a sustainable, high quality ACT public education system in response to the ACT Government Discussion Paper *Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges*.

The ACT public education system currently achieves a very high standard in student outcomes in comparison to other Australian states and also internationally. There is much of which to be proud for all those within the Department of Education (both central office sections and schools). The AEU recognises that no school system is perfect and that those associated with public education strive to continually improve individual schools and the system as a whole for the benefit of all students.

While there is always room to examine practice and structures, it is to be hoped that any proposals for change:

- build on the strengths of public education;
- are grounded in research and evidence as to their efficacy;
- result in clear and sustainable directions for the future;
- will attract commitment by governments of adequate resources and support for successful implementation and maintenance of any proposed changes; and
- are implemented as a result of community support following genuine consultation and engagement with the ACT education community and stakeholder groups.

The Melbourne Declaration on the national goals of Australian schooling set two fundamental educational goals:

1. The promotion of equity and excellence in education.
2. That all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

The focus of the discussion paper and any resulting outcomes must be the attainment of these important educational goals.

The ACT public education system should be underpinned by an unqualified commitment to ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to achieve his/her full potential at school.

This can only be attained by lifting overall student performance whilst simultaneously addressing underachievement.

This requires universal provision of high quality ACT public schools accessible to all students. After all, the only guarantee every child has to an education is enrolment at their local public school. Simply put, public schools have a legal and moral responsibility to be open to all students; private schools don't and aren't. It is from this simple premise that the primary obligation of governments to properly and adequately fund public schools logically follows.

The provision of high quality ACT public schools which are accessible to all and resourced to enable them to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to fulfill their full potential and achieve equality in their learning outcomes requires funding measures which satisfactorily address educational disadvantage.

This is central to the fundamental national goal of equity and excellence in education for all.

It is from these understandings that the AEU has adopted the following principles, central to which is a belief that true equity in Australian education can only exist when government schools set the standard for high quality education and the right of every Australian family to a well resourced, high quality public school in their community is guaranteed.

This guarantee ensures that every child has a right to:

- a high quality public school where all children can learn together and learn to live together
- qualified teachers and staff to meet their needs and aspirations
- a curriculum of the highest quality which ensures the development of the whole child
- a safe, modern 21st century learning environment
- achieve his/her personal best

The achievement of high quality education outcomes for every student requires recognition of the additional costs 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.

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. 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.

### **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 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.

### **Indigenous students**

ABS data shows that in 2009 80.1% of Indigenous students attended ACT government schools.

### **Students with Disabilities and Special Needs**

Productivity Commission data shows that in 2008, 80% of students with disabilities and special needs attended ACT government schools.

### **Students with Language Background Other than English [LBOTE]**

Data from the 2006 ABS Census 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%. 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.

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.

Today, schools in Australia, and especially in the ACT, compare favourably with other OECD nations at the highest levels of achievement in tests such as the PISA program for 15 year olds. Regardless of this record, we should not be content that other countries demonstrate higher levels of equity through a smaller spread – a narrower gap – between our high achieving students and those who are struggling. It is difficult to see how this issue is addressed in the current federal funding model which sees money distributed regardless of need. "Need" is a peripheral concept in the SES funding model. In a new model of funding, it must be front and centre.

The AEU-ACT Branch firmly believes that public schools hold a special place in the Australian social fabric and that they should be adequately resourced to set the standard of school education in this country.

AEU polling convincingly shows that bold, responsible policy to address the shortfall in public school funding will have the overwhelming support of the electorate, even amongst a high proportion of people who send their children to private schools.

In this submission, the AEU-ACT Branch will respond to the four focus questions in the discussion paper and will also discuss the varying merits of the 'what if' proposals put forward on pages 6 and 7 of the paper.

### **1. What needs to be strengthened or changed so that ACT public schools and colleges are schools of choice?**

The AEU firmly believes it is vital that governments and senior leadership of DET always use supportive, respectful and constructive language when discussing public schools and teachers. High quality education is vital to our society therefore governments are responsible for actively promoting the many positive aspects of public education from Preschool to TAFE. The teaching profession is consistently striving for excellence in educational provision but reaching this goal is limited by the available support and resources and the quality of collaboration with all stakeholders. Some language used comes from a deficit model, for example, implications that schools and teachers are lacking by saying there's a need to 'improve teacher quality' or ask how to 'improve high schools and colleges'. Rather than properly recognising the high quality educational provision in ACT public schools and encouraging schools and the system to build on and strengthen their positive achievements, this negative language devolves unreasonable levels of responsibility onto teachers and principals. Use of words such as "maintain" or "increase" have a more positive connotation than "improve", suggesting that a sound base exists upon which the future can be built.

The power of language to either positively influence or to inflict damage cannot be underestimated, particularly in regard to a profession that has been targeted and vilified for over a decade by politicians and the media. The status of the profession and the work of all those in education must be raised considerably within the community and sustained into the future. The use of positive language is just one action which will assist in raising morale, encourage teachers to remain in the profession and attract people into teaching.

Education is a shared responsibility of governments, the community, parents, principals, teachers and students themselves. The current focus on 'quality teachers' – as if these are currently absent from the profession - is something of a politically-engineered distraction from other issues such as status, recognition, reward and remuneration. Leading educationalist Professor of Auckland University states that only 30% of the in-school influence on a student's achievement is affected by their teacher. The remainder of the influences derive from the student themselves (a significant 50% which includes the student's prior cognitive ability, student's disposition to learn, affective and physical attributes), home, principal, peers and the school. This highlights the need to provide much broader support for families, the community and other agencies to ensure the best

outcomes for children and young people. Additionally, the early identification of issues in young children and early intervention to address these is a key area for government investment. Current levels of resources to support these provisions are insufficient.

The AEU calls upon the ACT government to actively and genuinely consult with the teaching profession about the future shape of ACT public schooling provision through their unions, associations and other networks. Furthermore, governments must treat teachers and education workers with respect in regard to both industrial and professional issues.

Current levels of resources are insufficient to meet the increasingly complex demands of the job, or to achieve and maintain attractive and competitive salaries. Savings achieved through measures such as the 2006 – 2009 school closures program must be returned to education to relieve the stress on resources and provisions that ACT public schools are now experiencing.

It is well understood that the ACT public school and TAFE system maintains high standards and meets the needs of the vast majority of students. However, equity of outcomes for *all* students regardless of family income, Indigeneity, language background, disabilities or special needs, or other socio-economic and cultural factors cannot be achieved unless there is a fundamental shift in the educational paradigm that motivates the ACT government. These factors are relevant for every stage of schooling.

### **A Genuine Education Revolution**

The AEU recommends the following investments in order to strengthen the public education system as a whole and increase enrolments:

- Address excessive workload issues that exist for teachers, principals and support staff.
  - Provide New Educators with a 20% reduction in their teaching load for the first two years of employment.
  - Provide additional staffing funds for one full-time experienced classroom teacher in each school per maximum five new educators to provide formal mentoring and support to each new educator.
  - Reduce and shed compliance and accountability measures (red tape) and duplication of services to enable all staff to concentrate on educational programs.
  - Employ at least 1 full-time IT specialist in each school to maintain networks and hardware, provide professional development and liaise with Intact.
  - Employ at least 2 additional administrative support personnel in every school to allow teachers and principals to focus on teaching and learning-related tasks.
- Ensure mainstream and specialist setting class sizes are capped at the maximum number of students according to AEU policy (Attachment A) to ensure teachers are able to provide more individualised learning experiences for students.
- Increase salaries for ACT public school and CIT teachers, to ensure teachers are recruited and retained in the system. This includes salary increases for casual relief teachers (as of January 2011, almost a 12% gap with NSW) and Deputy Principals (over 16% gap with NSW). TAFE teachers' salary gaps must also be addressed, including over 8% for Teacher Band 1.8, more than 15% for Senior Teaching Position and over 9% for Teacher Band 3. ACT DET pays teachers less than ACT Catholic or Anglican schools. More competitive salaries will greatly improve the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.

- Introduce a professional pay structure (eg. Highly Accomplished Teacher and Lead Teacher) which recognises and rewards high quality teaching. Teachers could apply move up the Classroom Teacher salary scale more quickly by meeting a set of negotiated and agreed standards. There must not be a quota on the number of teachers who can apply or who meet these standards. The AEU notes that this matter is in development locally, and will be influenced by the work undertaken at the Federal level.
- For all teaching positions which require a dual qualification, such as school counsellors and teacher librarians, reclassify their salary step to the proposed Leading Teacher. DET must meet all costs of any compulsory professional registration and required professional development for those who need a dual qualification to carry out their work.
- Increase the Teacher Professional Learning Fund to \$3million per annum and adjust this annually by the June quarter ACT CPI increases.
- Increase the Principal Professional Learning Fund to 1.5% (from 1%) of total annual principal salary costs to enable more professional development.
- Establish a Support Staff Professional Learning Fund and adjust it annually by CPI.
- Employ 5 additional Quality Teaching Consultants at School Leader C level – totalling 8 consultants, two for each school network - to support the continued implementation of the Quality Teaching model, the most significant initiative across the whole system. The SLCs would continue to work side-by-side with teachers in schools and ensure quality teaching practices are sustained well into the future.
- Employ an additional 8 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) School Leader Cs and 3 additional administrative staff in the Curriculum Support and Professional Learning Directorate to enhance the coordination and delivery of high quality in-school/cluster professional learning and support for the ongoing integration of ICT into classroom practice (particularly with the changeover to the Connected Learning Community).
- Employ 10 additional Student Management Consultants to increase the level of support to schools to implement effective student management processes.
- Provide the *Classroom Management and Instructional Strategies* course for all public school teachers and assistants who wish to complete it. DET should also work with the universities to introduce this program into Pre-service Education courses.
- Ensure the implementation of appropriate OH&S ACT Public Sector standards, including air conditioning, ergonomic furniture and IT hardware with technical support. Reduce the Comcare premium by properly addressing the causes of psychological injuries amongst DET employees and preventing such injuries in future.
- Restore the face-to-face teaching hours within the secondary sector to 18 hours per week for Level 1 teachers and reduce the face-to-face teaching hours in the preschool-primary sector to 18 hours per week for Level 1 teachers. This would enable teachers to provide more pastoral care support to students, time to build parent involvement, better support for transitions, student pathways etc.
- Broaden the range of alternate programs and settings (see Attachment B for suggested programs) to genuinely support the needs of ALL students (particularly students with emotional and/or behavioural disturbance, violent behaviours, severe mental health issues). These programs should be linked closely with a regular school to ensure genuine connections for students and staff and ensure sustainable, safe environments. Establish further alternative programs that are shown to be effective in supporting students to achieve Year 12 or equivalent e.g. establish a CCCares program for the northside of Canberra. Ensure transport is provided for students to enable them to access the programs that best suit them.

- Review the funding models used to provide funds to specialist schools and settings.
- Increase the number of professional support staff in the preschool-early years sector to ensure the delivery of early intervention services to:
  - 4 FTE Counsellors to serve the preschool sector
  - 4 FTE Early Intervention Support teachers
  - 4 FTE ESL teachers
  - 4 FTE Behaviour Management Support teachers
  - 1 FTE social worker to liaise with and support families and provide links to allied government and community support services
- Increase targeted funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, teachers and support services in Introductory English Centres (IECs) and schools to reflect the increased percentage of ESL students enrolled in ACT public schools (up 35% since 2000, representing 11% of the student population in 2009). Targeted funding support currently ceases when students reach a Language Performance Rating (LPR) of 1.75 (below average English proficiency) rather than LPR 4.0 (average native English speaking competence for their age and year level). Additional funds must be provided to enable all ESL teachers to undertake a TESOL qualification if they do not have this specialist qualification.
- Establish a support services hub model within each School Network which provides interagency support and resources over and above current provision within schools and the central office. These interagency hubs could provide services including early diagnosis and intervention services; counsellors/psychologists; careers/transitions support; health services (therapy, nutrition, welfare etc); disabilities services; Indigenous liaison, professional development etc.
- Establish a residential or day mental health care facility with access to education and/or training for primary and secondary students. Such a facility could provide support for students with a range of significant mental health issues, including those who exhibit violent behaviours. Similar facilities operate effectively interstate.

### **Teaching Workforce Issues**

Every public school student has the right to access a rich, broad curriculum taught by appropriately qualified teachers. Currently, in some subjects, student outcomes are compromised due to the fact they are being taught by a teacher who is working outside their area of expertise. There are also teachers with specialist qualifications who work outside their area of expertise or are teaching multi-age class/es. Other important programs such as information literacy (provided by teacher librarians) and languages are cut altogether due to the scarcity of specialist teachers.

The AEU opposes quick-fix programs such as *Teach for Australia* and *Teach Next*. Instead, governments must focus on long term solutions to support the development of high quality teachers, recruit them into ACT public schools and provide support to teachers to remain in the profession. Aside from programs that develop high-quality recruits, appropriate support must be provided to those teachers already in service who require additional qualifications, professional learning or other support to meet the demands placed upon them when working outside their area of training/expertise.

In regard to workforce issues in particular, the AEU calls upon the ACT government and DET to:

- Urgently develop and implement a plan to actively work with universities to promote teaching as a career choice, to recruit and retain teachers in all shortage areas (which include, but are not limited to, maths, science, teacher librarians, languages, ESL, Learner Assistance, Special Education, Counsellors, casual relief), and ensure workforce planning keeps pace with anticipated future areas of teacher supply shortage.
- Immediately develop and implement a plan address the casual relief teacher shortage to prevent the splitting of classes and/or compromise educational programs when no relief teacher is available, ensure that all teachers are able to attend professional development during school hours, and assist in addressing issues of workload, stress, and work-life balance.
- Improve workforce data collection, including compulsory exit surveys of teachers leaving the profession, transfer information, qualifications etc. in order to map and address attraction and retention trends.
- Develop a long term plan to recruit and retain enough counsellors (and not rely on under-qualified chaplains). Currently there are not enough counsellors to support the diverse needs of students and their families. This is a national issue that affects all levels of schooling and all sectors, public and non-government. Some public schools in the ACT only see their counsellor for half a day each week.

A perception of some parents and staff is that previous Enterprise Agreement teacher mobility provisions created instability and loss of corporate knowledge. The AEU is pleased to have negotiated the current Enterprise Agreement which balances teacher transfer rights with the maintenance of corporate knowledge, community liaison and the continuation of effective programs in schools. The new Transfer Entitlement provisions will assist the system to build stability and workforce capacity.

### **The Drift to Non-Government Schools**

There needs to be an in-depth examination of the reasons why some ACT parents and students opt for non-government schools. This should include an investigation into the perceptions of parents and the realities about each sector. The ACT government and DET must proactively address these issues wherever possible. There is a particular opportunity to survey those DET employees who send their child/ren to a non-government school.

DET must effectively address the perception, and in a few cases the reality, that public schools are not successful in addressing disruptive, bullying, violent or abusive behaviours of students. On a daily basis, teachers in public schools balance the rights of the many with the rights of the few students who exhibit disruptive behaviours. This is a great source of stress for teachers and principals and they urgently need support to manage the disruptive behaviours of students effectively. Some students require more targeted support such as pastoral care, welfare/family assistance, intervention support, counselling or an alternative program to help them to address their barriers to learning more effectively. There needs to be research into effective programs (interstate or overseas) that support such students and investment from government to implement these within the public education system, which has an obligation to educate all comers.

The perception of some parents who choose private education is that their children will supposedly mix with “nicer” peers. Status anxiety, middle class aspirations, the conflation of discipline with school uniforms, and self-imposed or external pressure may be factors which

influence parents to buy into the myth that private schools provide a better education. The AEU believes the most significant facts that may lead parents to choose a private school are that the public system is significantly under-resourced and significant Commonwealth funds are provided to non-government schools.

Partnerships between parents and schools have been demonstrated to be an important factor in supporting positive outcomes for students. DET needs to investigate successful programs that public schools can implement which assist them to more effectively engage parents in their child's education and the life of the school. Parent involvement drops off as students move into high school and college so programs need be appropriate for the stage of students' development.

The AEU welcomes the Building the Education Revolution funds for school infrastructure but notes that their use has been limited to a certain range of projects. Other areas of schools need renovation or rebuilding. Physical infrastructure in public schools must be equal to or better than private schools. Public school buildings and grounds are frequently noted by those working within them, and by observers, as needing further maintenance and renovations to be more attractive, pleasant environments for all. Such measures will continue to improve morale and also attract parents and students to enrol in public schools.

## **2. What needs to be done in ACT public schools and colleges to improve school graduation rates and ensure every student has a pathway to tertiary education and training or meaningful work?**

The AEU recommends the following measures:

- Continue programs such as Access 10 which provide an alternative pathway to achieving a Year 10 Certificate.
- Review the effectiveness of the Connect 10 and Achievement Centre programs, including the criteria for the selection of students, the delivery of the curriculum, support structures and sustainability (including the retention of high quality staff), opportunities for students to integrate with peers, and the standard of the outcomes achieved by the students.
- Ensure funding is available for:
  - additional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; ESL students; refugee students; students with disabilities; disadvantaged students, students from low SES backgrounds;
  - measures to address gender and the needs of (some) girls and (some) boys (e.g. issues such as access to all curriculum areas including VET programs; equity and diversity; promotion of 'non-traditional' courses for boys and girls).
- Adequate staffing and resources for Learning Support Centres in high schools to support students to achieve outcomes appropriate for their year level.
- Provision of increased funding for early intervention programs in the early years to identify and address educational, social, emotional and physical issues as soon as possible and prevent/reduce learning difficulties in later years.
- Provision of funding as required to:
  - support teachers in the effective delivery of high quality curriculum ensuring that the Australian Curriculum and the ACT Curriculum Framework are aligned;

- provide professional development and resources for all teachers in planning and implementing the curriculum;
- ensure the curriculum meets the needs of *all* students. Time and resources must be provided for teachers to make adaptations (e.g. specialist schools, ESL programs).
- Improved information services regarding education programs, services and support. For example, a single online portal (regarding programs, providers, pathways and support services for students, parents and teachers) and a support service hub in each school network with integrated service provision.
- Cross-school programs within each school network or cluster, such as Gifted and Talented/Enrichment programs; VET in Schools; Arts.
- Enhanced and formalised transition programs to include more frequent liaison opportunities for students to build connections between stages of schooling and networks between feeder schools for staff and students (to go both ways, not just from primary to high school to college).
- Development of a range of alternative programs and settings to support diverse models of schooling and student pathways to achieve Year 10 and Year 12.
- Introduction of a 'standard' student pathways plan template with the following features:
  - age-appropriate format;
  - privacy-protected;
  - subject to the use of established protocols in regard to use of the data;
  - available electronically; this electronic version could 'travel' with the student and be seen by approved educators to provide a consistent record of the student and avoid the current need for the student to "re-tell their story" with each change of circumstance.
- Improved data collection about students so that they can be more effectively supported throughout the various stages of their schooling.
- Provision of additional teacher time and resources to enable increased responsiveness to students' needs.
- Enhanced programs and structures that support students who also work part-time or have other needs which require greater flexibility.
- Recognition of students' work-based learning for skills attainment and inclusion of such skills as a contribution to Year 10 and Year 12 Certificates.
- Ensure there is a shared responsibility for student pathways (student-parent-school-community).
- Exploration of options to provide greater flexibility in student attendance patterns. Flexible start/finish times or split school shifts may have some merit as research shows teenage students are more productive later in the day. Such provision does raise the question a number of issues e.g. how does such flexibility prepare students for post-school options or employment? How can transport provision be improved to facilitate students moving from high school or college to CIT etc? What industrial issues would need to be addressed to protect work-life balance and ensure there is a common time where teachers' time overlaps for handover?
- More effective blending of 'academic' and 'vocational' courses so that all learning is acknowledged, valued and given credit. Educators, parents and students need to stop using these terms and avoid making unwarranted distinctions.
- Standardisation of the organisational models of 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. It is believed these models were introduced as a cost-cutting measure after the 2006 Costello Review (such as one principal for 2 sites) rather than being based on sound evidence and educational quality. The Early Childhood Schools, including the well-established and popular Co-Op School, are a good model and have proven effective with enrolments in the four new ECSs growing.

The ACT achieves positive results for Year 12 graduation rates however the recent changes that require students to remain in education or training until Year 12 or equivalent (earn or learn) raise a number of implications.

The value and relevance of the Year 10 Certificate to most students may need to be reviewed. AEU members state that before the changed requirements, high school students didn't seem to take the Year 10 Certificate seriously as there was 'automatic' progression to Year 11. Some students struggled to meet the standard of college courses and either changed courses or dropped out. With the new requirements, this scenario may apply to a larger cohort of students, so there is a need for high schools and colleges to provide more support, flexibility and a wider range of options for students to achieve Year 12. Any expansion of provision is likely to have significant resource implications.

One option may be to assess Year 10 students against a moderated set of minimum standards for each learning area. If students have not achieved the appropriate standard then they could be entitled to additional support such as a bridging program before commencing college courses. As is the case now, students need to be given the flexibility to change courses and, if necessary, stay on at college for longer than 2 years. Flexible student timetables already apply in some schools for some students to allow, for example, more contact with other agencies, work experience or training, or to support students on graduated return to school.

### **3. How can ACT public high schools and colleges be better connected to other education providers and the community to extend choice and opportunity for all students?**

The AEU recommends the following:

- Ensure all students access a broad, rich curriculum that meets their needs. This must be the core concern of schools and colleges. Curriculum should not be driven and narrowed by the needs of industry/business. Once students' needs are met, the needs of employers will be met.
- 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.
- Ensure there is sufficient recurrent funding to maintain the Federal Government's Trade Training Centres initiative.
- Provide more time and resources for VET programs and teachers, who are experiencing a completely unsustainable workload.

- Map all VET provision across the ACT, remove duplication of courses and facilities, and ensure all providers work collaboratively not competitively to provide high quality education.
- Enable DET to be the single Registered Training Organisation for all courses provided in public high schools and colleges, rather individual colleges being the RTO.
- Ensure all teachers of VET have the appropriate vocational and Certificate IV Training and Assessment qualifications.
- Strengthen the links between public schools and CIT. There is an urgent need to address the significant workload issues for VETiS teachers and the industrial issues affecting CIT teachers working in the schools sector.
- Ensure work experience placements part of a structured program and that these are appropriate to the age and needs of students involved.
- Encourage teachers to be involved with their professional associations which often provide excellent Professional Development courses.
- Enhance collaboration between high schools and colleges to provide a connected learning community, possibly giving students greater choice in courses.
- Address the current structural impediments to linking high school and college courses which only permit certification of Year 11 and 12 studies (BSSS legislation).
- Develop and promote collaborations between schools, parents and the community and resource sustainable models to enable this to continue.
- Well-considered school-business partnerships, with the needs of students at the centre and with a focus on maintaining the breadth and depth of the curriculum. For each partnership there must be a Memorandum of Understanding established prior to any formal arrangement to ensure ethical practices are adhered to and that students' needs are paramount.

**4. Where are the opportunities for innovation and growth that will ensure the ACT public school system is meeting the needs and aspirations of our students and the broader ACT community?**

The AEU recommends the following:

- Research alternative programs/settings that are working elsewhere and introduce to the ACT public education system.
- Targeted funding and support for students with social and behavioural needs and access to health and social services to address their needs.
- Provide better support and resources for teachers who already collaborate with other education providers such as VET in Schools teachers; ANU School of Music and ANU Secondary College.
- Ongoing professional development for teachers which focuses on evidence-based assessment of and for learning.
- Align student report formats across the system to assist with consistent information for students, parents and teachers in the next stage of schooling, and reduce workload for teachers.
- Allow the Quality Teaching model to be properly embedded across the system before any further new initiatives are introduced. This will provide staff and students with the opportunity to genuinely focus on this positive initiative and would also promote a sense of stability for parents.

- Where DET has influence, ensure new initiatives are not introduced without appropriate adherence to the Enterprise Agreement. Review current initiatives to establish if they are outdated or being duplicated and shed or revise as appropriate.
- Review some current initiatives (particularly those imposed by both levels of government) that are not evidence-based e.g. mass standardised testing and the publication of results has been discredited in the UK and the USA, yet the Federal Government has ignored the professional views of teachers and academics who oppose this direction.
- Education Ministers must seek the professional advice of teachers, principals and DET senior officials.

In regard to the Virtual Learning Environment/cLc, the AEU acknowledges that this initiative:

- Enables teachers to share resources, lesson plans and keep a focus on the curriculum and pedagogy as the driver for the cLc.
- Could support better collaboration between schools (shared planning, lesson implementation) and enable professional support such as online Quality Teaching activities.
- May save teachers time in the long term but that there are certainly workload implications initially with the transition from MyClasses, monitoring of blogs etc.
- Could address the teacher shortage in some areas, for example, language lessons online with a class in another school or state.
- Enables accelerated learning for those students who need extension, including across-age cohorts.
- Allows the option of students working from home and elsewhere including those who are injured long-term but can still focus on learning, those who missed a lesson and need to catch up, learn at a flexible pace. Consideration needs to be given to students who may need 1-to-1 support from a teacher/parent and duty of care issues.
- online/virtual learning options for some aspects of certain courses could be workable as this could provide a flexible option for those who work part-time or those who are more self-directed.
- Could enable video conferencing for classes, teacher-parent discussions, etc.

The discussion about use of the cLc at home by students assumes they have access to ICT at home. This is a significant equity issue that must be considered as not all students have home access.

Face-to-face contact with teachers and students must be retained as social interaction is vital. The growth in the VLE raises questions such as what constitutes teachers' work hours, training implications, resource requirements, duty of care issues and the legal requirement to 'attend' school. It also has the potential to redefine what a teacher is, what a class is and what school is.

**5. What is your professional opinion and what evidence are you aware of that supports the various 'What If' proposals on pages 6 and 7 of the Discussion Paper?**

Many of the 'What if' proposals are already occurring in public schools to some extent. It is important to publically promote these programs within in the public education system and the wider community to raise awareness.

Specialty programs including VET in schools should be offered across the system in a complementary way, rather than in a competitive way. Transport issues must be addressed to ensure equitable access to courses across the territory and to support better collaboration and coordination within the system. The wide range of excellent programs in public schools offers opportunities for teachers as well, with the possibility of professional development and mentoring around quality teaching model activities.

One of the great strengths of public education has always been its capacity to operate effectively and co-operatively as a "system". Principal autonomy potentially poses a threat to the public school "system", e.g. schools competing with each other for staff to the detriment of the needs of the system. Some AEU members see 'principal autonomy' as code for the ACT government and DET as devolving their responsibilities and the associated workload onto principals and teachers.

For some of the 'what if' proposals, there are industrial issues that would require exploration and resolution prior to any implementation. Workload issues, face-to-face hours, definition of work hours, travel time and allowances, duty of care, relative parity of conditions, and work-life balance are just some of the issues that should be examined in this context.

Many schools already have single sex classes for some subjects (e.g. Health and PE) on a permanent basis and other classes may be set up as single-sex on a temporary or ongoing basis as appropriate.

The AEU does not believe that single sex and selective entry schools are appropriate in the ACT public school system. Grouping students on the basis of ability, sex, ethnicity or religion should be avoided. Students need to learn how to work cooperatively and respectfully together and co-educational settings support this important social development. Equity for students is a key principle of the public education system. Public schools provide a real and rich experience of the world in all its diversity and schools actively develop mutual respect amongst all students regardless of their ability/disability, socio-economic background, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. A number of public schools already provide specialist programs within their curriculum which require students to meet a certain standard to be eligible, for example, gifted and talented programs or sport programs. Each public school currently provides a diverse range of programs to develop the whole child and value their talents, whatever they may be. Making a school selective or single sex would limit the choice of local schools for families and may force them to go further afield to another public school or in fact to a private school.

Schools are able to pool resources under School Based Management. For example, Lanyon Cluster already shares an SLC, and there are no impediments to decisions such as a cluster of schools employing a shared Business Manager. To support schools to build collaboration, there needs to be central coordination and support to establish arrangements and sustain such programs long term. To facilitate schools sharing educational programs,

there needs to be improved public transport options for students to travel from one campus to another and excellent ICT infrastructure to access online/flexible learning options.

Before considering partnerships between private and public school, the public education system should focus its attention on the development of partnerships/collegiates first (across the same sector i.e. high school–high school, as well as across different sectors). 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 entry restrictions/conditions. This funding inequity for public schools remains entrenched, partly due to the current unfair Commonwealth school funding model. The AEU notes that the Commonwealth Funding Model is currently being reviewed.

There do currently exist public/private partnerships/developments such as the shared public-Catholic campus in Gold Creek. Any expansion of such options would need to consider the funding, resource and enrolment implications for public education. The AEU notes that there are often instances of collaborative, cross-sectoral PD arrangements in the system, and between public/private schools. Such arrangements can be valuable for all participants, and the AEU believes these initiatives are appropriate as long as there is full cost recovery where DET provides the activity, or there is a reciprocal arrangement that recognises the costs of the activity to the provider. The AEU also considers that there is merit in exploring public school access to private school facilities where these have been partly or wholly funded by governments.

**Penny Gilmour**  
**AEU-ACT Branch Secretary**

**September 2010**

## **Attachment A**

### **CLASS SIZES (as at August 2009)**

**[including Potentially Hazardous Class Sizes and Special Education Class Sizes]**

#### **1. Current class size arrangements:**

Members of the AEU are not required to teach classes which contain more than the number of pupils specified in the following schedule:

Preschools	25
Kindergarten – 3	21
Years 4 – 6	30
Years 7 - 9	32
Year 10	30
Years 11 – 12	25

#### **2. Target Class Sizes**

Council endorses the following policy to form the basis of the Union's claim to decrease existing class sizes to the following levels:

Preschool	21
Kindergarten	21
Years 1-3	21
Years 4-6	25
Years 7-10	25
Years 11-12	25

In achieving the target class sizes referred to in this policy, Council and Executive should determine strategies which continue the high priority given to the reduction of class sizes in all sectors. Any campaigning conducted by the AEU to reduce class sizes should encompass the following features:

- (a) The involvement of the ACT community as appropriate.
- (b) The staffing formulae should provide sufficient staff to ensure that AEU members are not required to teach in excess of the above number of students. There should be no loss of working conditions.
- (c) No reduction in other services to achieve lower class sizes.
- (d) No redistribution of resources between the sectors.
- (e) There will be an incremental strategy which will target areas of need in order of priority, beginning with the reduction of class sizes in high schools.
- (f) The AEU will make Budget submissions and undertake EBA negotiations and election campaigning which reflect this policy.
- (g) An analysis of the impact of the Class Sizes Campaign on the provision of non teaching time and curriculum offerings in schools.

#### **3. Special Education Class Sizes**

The AEU recommends the following student to teacher and Special Teaching Assistant (STA) ratios for special education classes. These numbers are not to be considered absolute: there may be a need for flexibility in certain situations, eg where combined or composite classes are formed, or in classes where the profile of student needs (eg where students have multiple diagnoses or where challenging behaviours are extreme) is such that additional staffing is required.

Where the terms "high needs" and "moderate needs" are used in this policy, it is critical that there be a transparent understanding of what these terms mean, ie what level of points generated by the appraisal process places a student in one or the other of these categories.

- Autism units:  
High needs students: 1 teachers and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 4 students.

- Moderate needs students: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 6 students.
- General Learning Support Units: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 8 students
- Learning Support Centres (Primary): 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 8 students.
- Learning Support Centres (Secondary): 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 10 students.
- Communication Disorder Classes: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 8 students,
- Special Schools: High need students as identified by a modified appraisal (SCAN) process: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 4 students. Moderate need students as identified by a modified appraisal (SCAN) process: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 6 students.
- Early Childhood classes within Special Schools: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 6 students.
- Early Childhood Centres (ECCs; Special Schools' outreach settings): 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 8 students.
- Early Intervention Units: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 12 students.
- Autism Intervention Units: 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 4 students.
- Mainstream Classes: Where students with special needs are placed in mainstream classes, the AEU believes that, in accordance with our "Integration of Students with Special Needs", adequate resources must be identified and given prior to placement.

#### **4. Potentially Hazardous Classes (PH Classes)**

The AEU will continue to negotiate implementation of the following with the Department and in schools:

1. That a class be defined as a potentially hazardous class if a significant amount of the teaching time places students/staff in a potentially hazardous environment which may affect the health and safety of those individuals.
2. PH classes are to contain no more than 24 students or the number of pupils that the teaching space and equipment will safely cater for, whichever is the less. Alternatively a risk assessment may be done to ascertain the appropriate number of students.
3. PH classes are to be identified by the school prior to the commencement of each school year. If there is disagreement about what a PH class is, then the school should seek an independent and objective analysis of the class by a panel consisting of the Department's OH&S Officers, a specialist in the field (eg consultant) and a representative of the AEU.
4. PH classes receive extra staffing points as part of the secondary schools staffing formula for practical classes. These staffing points are to be used only for PH classes and are not to be used to reduce class sizes in other classes or to give flexibility elsewhere in the school.
5. The Branch will negotiate with the Department a separate component within the staffing formula for PH classes. This component will vary with the number of PH classes in a school.

## **Attachment B**

### **Additional Programs and Alternative Educational Settings to Meet the Diverse Needs of Students**

The AEU – ACT Branch proposes the following alternative educational programs and settings for the ACT public education system:

- a) Early intervention settings for Kinder to Year 6 students with acute behavioural disorders (particularly violent behaviours) to provide intense behaviour modification and psychological services;
- b) Alternative settings for Years 7 and 8 students with extreme behavioural disturbance, including violence where students can be supported to work through these issues in small groups or one-to-one whilst continuing their education and then be assisted with the transition back to their school;
- c) Introduce at least 2 settings, one on the north side and one on the south side, to provide short term respite for high school students who may need time away from their mainstream school to work through disengaging and anti-social behaviours;
- d) Further support for programs which introduce middle years students to employment opportunities;
- e) Further support for programs which use creative and performing arts to help young people with mental health issues to adapt to schooling;
- f) An additional Connect10 program (for students at risk of not achieving a Year 10 Certificate) be established at Gungahlin and another at the proposed Vocational Pathways School at Weston (former CIT site).
- g) An educational program designed specifically for students released from Bimberi Youth Detention Centre (including Access 10 and VET training in areas such as Automotive and Metals Certificates, Horticulture Certificates etc) delivered at the proposed Weston Vocational Pathways School. The employment of a case manager to support students' transitions into the alternate setting would assist in building healthy and trusting relationships between students and their teachers.
- h) The ACT Government provide alternative education opportunities in the area of the arts, for example, pottery/ceramics, textiles, woodworking and jewellery, for students from upper primary to senior secondary. These can be linked with existing schools on a cluster model and/or with community-oriented partnerships based in an appropriate site. Both the closed school sites at Hall and Tharwa villages would lend themselves to such programs which could enhance the social capital and amenity of both the local and broader community.
- i) The ACT Government has made a significant investment in the Performing Arts in its 2007/2008 Budget. However, the performing arts in schools, particularly drama, requires additional support if students are to benefit from the enrichment of their curriculum. Capital investment and maintenance of existing facilities and opportunities for teacher professional learning would enhance opportunities for students' development. In order to lead and support teachers in undertaking their work in the Performing Arts a Departmental position should be created in an advisory capacity. Such a position should also have a liaison role with industry to further expand opportunities for students.