



Australian Education Union

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Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Attention: Tim Watling, Committee Secretary

Dear Mr Watling

Re: Australian Education Bill 2012

I write on behalf of the Australian Education Union in response to the additional questions on notice from Senator McKenzie.

- 1. The Gonski model suggests that Catholic schools should be the first to get additional funds given they operate on 90% of the resources of government schools presently. Does the AEU support this aspect of the Gonski reforms? Or should the Gonski model only apply to State schools? Please clarify the AEU's position.*

The AEU is unaware of the basis for such a suggestion. The Gonski Report states explicitly that a significant increase in funding is required across all schooling sectors, with the largest part of this increase flowing to the government sector because of the significant numbers and greater concentration of disadvantaged students attending government schools.

To that end the Report proposed a new model, with schools in all sectors receiving base funding with additional loadings based on actual student demographics to meet particular educational needs associated with socioeconomic background, disability, English language proficiency, Indigeneity, school size and school location.

The Report recognised that schools with similar student populations required the same level of resources regardless of whether they are located in the government, Catholic or independent school sectors. Further, that some non-government schools would be fully publicly funded where they serve students or communities with very high levels of need, for example, special schools, majority Indigenous schools and remote 'sole provider' schools.

The AEU supports the implementation of the funding model proposed by Gonski as outlined in Section Nine of the *Australian Education Bill 2012*.

2. *Does the AEU have a preferred method of determining SES, location data, school achievement data, disability?*

The Gonski Report is clear that successful implementation of new funding arrangements to meet the real needs of Australian schools and school students requires open, transparent independent processes for determining the resource standard and the loadings, which are consistent for all schools, to ensure that resources are provided where they are needed.

We support this much-needed reform. It stands in stark contrast to the current arrangements which are largely driven by political accommodations rather than ‘best practice’ educational policy imperatives. They are unnecessarily complex, lacking in coherence and transparency and fail to equitably deliver resources where they are most needed; so much so that more than half of Australia’s non-government schools are funded at a higher level than their SES would entitle them to.

The AEU supports the Gonski approach to the determination of loadings; namely that they should:

- relate to objective and measurable characteristics of students and schools;
- be evidenced by a demonstrable independent correlation with poor educational outcomes or higher costs;
- be able to be calculated at school level using available and reliable nationally consistent data;
- help target resources in the most educationally effective way; and
- be relatively simple to understand and apply.

We also recognise the validity of Gonski’s observation that loadings cannot be set in stone. The method by which they, and other elements of the resource standard, are determined should be dynamic and evolve over time, in response to school and student needs through regular periodic and independent review.

3. *Is the AEU confident that the methods in the funding model deliver the best result for its members?*

Implementing the funding model is the best opportunity we have to fundamentally reform our current funding system which demonstrably fails too many of our children. The AEU and its members have no doubt that this is in the best interests of students, teachers, schools, parents and the wider community.

Our members work in the system which does the ‘heavy lifting’ in Australian education, as our submissions and representations around the Gonski Review and the Australian Education Bill make very clear. A significant increase in funding, delivered through a new funding model which recognises this and is designed to address student needs, is very much in their best interests and those of their students.

They know that giving schools the necessary resources, and targeting them to where they are most needed, will facilitate the implementation of programs to give every child the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

That is why we have seen such overwhelming levels of support for the implementation of the Gonski recommendations, not only by our members, but also by parents, business leaders, community and welfare groups across the country.

The current Bill provides a foundation for the achievement of funding reform consistent with the Gonski principles and key recommendations.

4. *Is the AEU confident that the amount of money allocated is enough to drive the reforms?*

As we said in our appearance before the Committee, we are confident that the recommendation made by the Gonski Review for an investment of an extra \$6.5 billion (2012 dollars) – half a percent of GDP – targeted in such a way as to ensure that every child can reach their full potential, is a sound basis for schools funding reform.

The Review determined that this is the amount of money required for us to seriously address improving our educational outcomes and tackle educational disadvantage, on the basis of all the research they commissioned as well as international evidence.

5. *Can the AEU quantify the additional staff workload that will be required to collect data?*

The AEU does not have access to all the information which would be required to quantify the additional staff workload involved in the collection of data consistent with the requirements outlined in our response to question two.

6. *Is the AEU satisfied that there enough teachers, suitably qualified to deliver on the National Plan for School improvement? If not, please outline which potential announced conditions of public funding remain problematic.*

The AEU recognises that problems associated with teacher supply across the country are longstanding and highlight the critical need for adequate workforce planning.

We note the significant work undertaken over the last several years towards attracting, developing, supporting and retaining a high-quality teaching and school leadership workforce in Australian schools; further that a key aspect of providing additional resources for schools is the provision of ongoing professional development and professional learning of teachers in order to ensure that we have best practice in our classrooms.

The emphasis on quality teaching and learning in the National Plan for School Improvement provides the platform for significant reform of issues around teacher supply; including a commitment to lifting quality in teaching through a requirement of “more classroom experience before graduation and higher entry requirements for the teaching profession”; the provision of the “best training and support as a new teacher”; and continuing professional learning and ongoing professional development.

7. *Specifically, are there enough trained teachers in the 4 target Asian languages? What should be done to address these issues? How much will this cost? Who should be responsible for this cost?*

The question further highlights the ongoing problems with teacher supply and the need for better workforce data, planning and management practices in order to balance supply and demand to meet the needs of schools across the states/territories and across the country.

In the absence of this data it is not possible for the AEU to adequately quantify the numbers of appropriately trained and qualified teachers required, or meeting the costs associated with their provision, which would be a matter for negotiation through coordinated efforts by all jurisdictions and relevant stakeholders.

An essential precondition of implementing the National Plan for School Improvement is meeting the expectation of the Australian community that all students, whatever their socio-economic background, location, the type of school they attend or aspects of their personal circumstances, have the right to be taught by highly trained and well qualified teachers in all subject areas.

Yours sincerely

Angelo Gavrielatos
Federal President