



Australian Education Union

Federal Office

*Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street, Southbank, Victoria, 3006
PO Box 1158, South Melbourne, Victoria, 3205
Federal Secretary : Susan Hopgood
Federal President : Angelo Gavrielatos*

*Phone : +61 (0)3 9693 1800
Fax : +61 (0)3 9693 1805
Email : aeu@aeufederal.org.au
Web : www.aeufederal.org.au*

28 March 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email : cewr.sen@aph.gov.au

Attention: Tim Watling Committee Secretary

Dear Mr Watling

Re: Teaching and Learning (maximising our investment in Australian schools)

I write on behalf of the Australian Education Union in response to a number of questions on notice.

- I. During the hearing Senator McKenzie requested that we take a question on notice regarding increased school autonomy and its relationship to educational improvement. The AEU made the point that global findings in reports from the OECD show that where there is an improvement in educational outcomes with respect to autonomy, it is not in the sense of devolution and managerialism, but rather where there is greater professional autonomy with respect to curriculum design, delivery, assessment and reporting.

Senator McKenzie asked whether, in the absence of any improvement, there is any evidence of decline in educational outcomes associated with devolution and managerialism.

The claims made by governments in Australia that greater principal and school autonomy will lead to an overall improvement in student outcomes is not supported by the bulk of evidence from major research studies. The evidence from New Zealand shows no overall improvement; the evidence on charter schools is mixed, again with no overall improvement; and the evidence on academies and 'free schools' is mixed at best.

With respect to specific evidence on devolution and managerialism (and other policies focussed on 'choice and competition' between schools) and a decline in student outcomes, we would refer the Committee to Australian research such as the body of work by Stephen Lamb and Richard Teese from the University of Melbourne. Their widely known and well respected research analyses show the negative effects on student outcomes of the implementation of such policies in Victoria and the huge costs

to low SES communities and their schools and students. It is outlined and referenced in our written submission.

As outlined in the submission, Australia now has one of the most segregated school systems in the world with significant negative consequences for student achievement and our overall performance as a country. Analysis of international data (eg PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) and national data (eg NAPLAN), confirmed by studies like the 2011 NSW Education Department analysis of individual student background and performance data as well as aggregated school level data, all show the extent to which Australian student achievement is disproportionately affected by the impact of social background factors. This is particularly so for students from low SES and Indigenous backgrounds. Further, as noted in our submission, Australia has relatively large concentrations of disadvantaged students in disadvantaged schools compared to other OECD countries, and the ‘compounding effect on disadvantage and underperformance creates a vicious circle for these students and schools’.

II. Senator McKenzie also placed a number of written questions on notice:

1. Would you describe your engagement with universities as authentic, collaborative, useful and/or effective? Please provide reasons in your response.

Whenever the AEU has engaged with university/universities on issues pertaining to the profession, we have always considered our engagement to be constructive.

2. What is your opinion on Melbourne University's call for teaching to be made an entirely graduate profession? [Melbourne University, Submission 20, p. 6]

The AEU agrees that quality university preparation is an essential element of initial teacher education. We support work undertaken towards a nationally consistent high quality teaching profession and the importance of standards and minimum professional qualifications, and the accompanying need to demonstrate rigour in their development and attainment. Together with demonstrated appropriate teaching knowledge, skills and practice, they form the foundation requirements for registration following a period of ‘probation’.

3. You have called for the collection, collation and publication of comprehensive data on teacher supply and demand. Which organisation do you think should perform this role? Have you discussed this proposal with the federal government? Is this type of data collected for any other professions? [Submission 16, p. 33].

Issues around teacher supply and demand continue to be a major problem for staffing Australia’s schools and highlight the need for better workforce planning in the teaching profession. The AEU is supportive of the work being undertaken under the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality to improve the quality and availability of teacher workforce data and existing jurisdictional workforce data systems. The National Teaching Workforce Dataset is a step in the right direction for national level workforce planning for the teaching profession.

4. Do you support Deakin University's suggestion that schools should have a business manager to free up Principals to focus on teaching and learning? [Deakin University, Submission 22]

The AEU considers that all schools should be adequately resourced to enable them to effectively undertake the myriad functions they are required to perform, including appropriate administrative support for school leadership.

Due to increased devolution and cuts to state/territory education budgets, schools, and in particular principals and school leadership, are being required to undertake an increased range of functions for which they are not adequately resourced, taking them away from the core business of teaching and learning.

5. Would you support Australia requiring all teaching graduates to pass a test to demonstrate that they meet the minimum standards of knowledge and skill before they are registered as teachers? (Australian Council for Educational Research, Submission 26, p. 4).

The Productivity Commission study of the teaching workforce noted that teachers acquire and develop their skills and knowledge through a combination of pre-service training (instruction and practicum) and employment (professional development and practical experience, including being mentored). Teaching quality encompasses the quality of initial entrants to teacher training, the quality of in-service support and professional development, and the quality of the environment within which teachers work, including resourcing and professional and collegial support. It is a complex process which cannot be reduced to a single measure.

The development and assessment of the appropriate standards of knowledge and skill should be integrated into Initial Teacher Education courses and units of study.

We are perplexed by the contradiction between policy approaches focussed on developing and retaining a high quality professional teaching and leadership workforce with high entry and performance standards, and costly short-term policy approaches like Teach for Australia and Teach Next and the deregulation of entry to Initial Teacher Education through uncapping subsidised university places which impacts on the output of some teacher education courses.

III. The committee also placed a written question on notice:

The committee has heard that a large proportion of teachers in their first years of teaching work as casuals or on fixed-term contracts. One cause of this was said to be the need to hold positions for those on maternity or other leave. Do you consider this to be the predominant cause of the widespread use of casuals and contracts? Are there other causes that you can elaborate on?

Filling positions held by teaching staff on maternity or other leave has been one of the reasons for the use of casuals and fixed-terms contracts by state/territory employing authorities.

In recent years, moves towards devolution and greater responsibility for principals in selection of school staff at the local level are a notable factor in the increased use of casual and fixed term employment by schools.

As noted in our submissions, the evidence supports the AEU's position that increased devolution is aimed at shifting responsibility, risk and blame from the state to local schools, principals and parents. This will do nothing more than contribute to even greater segregation in the provision of schooling and a deepening inequality in educational outcomes.

Integral to this process of shifting risk from the state to individual schools, is the further shifting of risk from management to individual teachers, a direct outcome of which is a growth in insecure work.

It is no coincidence that, for example, in excess of 18% of teachers in Victoria, the most devolved system in Australia, are on fixed term contracts as opposed to ongoing employment, and there has been a rapid growth in the same in WA associated with the IPS and in NSW with attempts to devolve.

Yours sincerely

Angelo Gavrielatos
Federal President