A SUBMISSION BY THE

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION

TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT,

EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

September 2000

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Gender Equity: Preamble

The Australian Education Union (AEU) appreciates the opportunity it has to make this submission to the Inquiry Into the Education of Boys. The AEU represents 155,000 teachers in schools, pre-school centres, TAFE Institutes and other educational settings across Australia and it has a long-standing involvement in issues relating to the work of the Inquiry.

The AEU has a long term interest and involvement in these matters and is keen to work with Government on this important issue.

The AEU is committed to a fully funded, free, quality public education system.

The AEU believes that all students have the right to be educated to their potential as participating, responsible people.

The AEU is committed to promoting gender equity in education settings to bring about a safe and challenging learning environment for all students.

The AEU notes that narrow, traditional concepts of masculinity have often resulted in male behaviour which has caused harm to other boys in terms of violent behaviour and harm to girls in terms of violence towards them. This has often meant a school culture which is not safe and healthy for all boys and girls.

The AEU believes that gender equity in education is about improving the educational outcomes for both girls and boys.

The AEU rejects a "competing victims" model and sees girls and boys needs as intertwined and parallel priorities.

Gender equity focuses on the development of positive constructions of both masculinity and femininity. These positive constructions should recognise and redress power dynamics, which traditionally exist between men and women, boys and girls.

Understanding of the process of gender construction is crucial if schools and systems are to work for equitable and improved educational experiences for girls and boys.

Dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity define males and females as opposites by highlighting their differences and assigning them unequal value, status and power.

These dominant concepts limit, in different ways, expectations of girls' and boys' schooling experiences and successes.

The AEU has extensive policy on Gender Equity (See Appendix 1 - AEU Policy on Gender Equity 1996 and Appendix 1a - AEU Draft 2000 Gender Equity Policy and Action Plan) and wishes to highlight the following from the 1996 policy:

1.   The AEU is committed to promoting gender equity in education settings to bring about a safe and challenging learning environment for all students. The AEU believes that the critical factor in achieving gender equity is cultural change. As Bob Connell stated, "Progress in education requires building a *culture of equity*. In a culture of equity, all forms of injustice are automatically contested, and an ethic of mutual care, not the search for competitive advantage, is central to policy making".

2.   The AEU Gender Equity Policy complements and builds upon the AEU's commitment to the education and training rights of women and girls and affirmative action strategies detailed in specific policies.

3.   Gender reform in education should :

   3.1   have as its basis research on issues of gender, sexuality and other equity issues;

   3.2   address the needs of all students, and the power relationships which exist within and between the sexes;

   3.3   include programs which focus on the construction of gender and its impact on learning outcomes and personal development;

   3.4   provide programs which redress the impact of gender construction and which may include differential treatment to ensure more equitable outcomes;

   3.5   be holistic in its approach and integral to all policies and programs in education settings;

   3.6   address the issues of sexuality in gender and power relationships.

An Overview

Contemporary reality

Teachers across Australia are in no doubt that there are fundamental changes affecting boys and men which are leading to shifts, doubts, underperformance and self-questioning for some young males across Australia. However, we see these developments as social changes which have manifestations in educational settings rather than as issues isolated to schooling as a process. If, however, schools can seek to address and remedy some of the real problems which are identified then it is our role as educators to do so.

Approaches which see the changes in the roles and identities of boys and men as isolated to educational processes or caused and exacerbated by some progress in the education of girls and young women are misdirected, unthinkingly misogynous and literally reactionary.

The difficulties that some boys are encountering can indeed be exacerbated by government policy especially as it unfolds at the local level. Governments would be wise to consider whether the failure to adequately support the Full Service Schools Program, the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the Country Areas Program to take but three examples prevents government, educators and the community to adequately address the difficulties young people are encountering in establishing their lives and their socially-based identity.

Whilst there is indeed some evidence to indicate that some boys are not achieving their full academic potential a mature analysis of these issues ought go well beyond comparative tables of marks and results and look at the kind of world and expectation system we are constructing for our young-male and female.

The advances made by girls and young women in recent times are characterised by progress in terms of autonomy, purpose and identity. People interested in the question of boys' education would do well to emulate what the women's movement has achieved in these domains.

It is crucial that the Inquiry be allowed to conduct its considerations in an environment that goes well beyond the anecdotal discussions that have featured heavily in media coverage of the Inquiry's work thus far. We welcome the release of the research led by Professor Jane Kenway and commissioned by DETYA entitled "Factor Influencing Educational Performance of Males and Females in schools and their initial destinations after leaving school" and recommend implementation of its findings.

Sober consideration of the Inquiry's brief will best be served by a broad analysis of the roles of males and females including their situations before, beyond and after their schooling experiences. Gender is one important factor affecting educational experiences and outcomes but we must consider along with it, complementary factors such as socioeconomic class, the position of Indigenous Australians, the different experiences and outcomes of students from various cultures and the changing nature of our economy and society.

Most fundamental to our submission is the view that educational outcomes are not finite commodities to be greedily squabbled over by the sexes. The achievements and advances made by some girls is recent times is a situation to be celebrated and further encouraged. Schooling is not a race between boys and girls but a mutual and complementary pursuit of standards and individual development and maturation.

On certain indices suicide, drug-abuse, crime and underperformance, some boys and young men are figuring to a disturbing, even alarming, extent. To seek to address the perceived problems of boys by deploring or diminishing the achievement of girls is odd and even misanthropic. It is timely to point out also that beyond the school years, females often proceed into a society which disadvantages them in terms of employment, training, remuneration, political power and career advancement.

As educators we see our task as facilitating the full human development of all of the boys and girls in our care. The AEU is thus committed to promoting gender equity in education settings to bring about a safe and challenging learning environment for all students. The AEU believes that the critical factor in achieving this is cultural change. As Professor Bob Connell has stated, "Progress in education requires building a culture of equity. In a culture of equity, all forms of injustice are automatically contested, and an ethic of mutual care, not the search for competitive advantage, is central to policy-making".

Boys becoming responsible male citizens

Gender is largely socially constructed and is fundamental in the development of self-concept and in shaping the range of experiences and opportunities available to men and women. Gender responds to social change and accordingly differs from one society to another across social classes, ethnic and cultural groups and within the same society over time. Gender is dynamic and is influenced by class, religion, culture, geographic location, ability, family and community. As we are now observing, gender can also be deconstructed.

Young males in contemporary Australia are faced with a society and economy which is radically changing the demands and expectations it places on us all. The economy that favoured brawn and power and the supremacist role of males is diminishing. The decline in our manufacturing base and our shift towards a post-industrial society means the era of manufacture and muscle as modes of work, survival and identity are in decline. In a technological future, brain power and the capacity for self-expression are becoming the new tools of trade. The old forms of maleness are less celebrated and indeed less acceptable. Men and boys are having different and more complex expectations placed upon them. Not all males are coping with this.

Work, learning and social relationships which might have relied in the past on a dominant masculinity which saw the manifestation of aggression, individual competition and the subordination of females are changing. Some males are not.

A climate of reason

The first objective in adequately addressing the issues affecting Boys' Education within the brief of the Committee is to create a climate of debate which eschews the sensationalist, divisive and ill-founded character of some of the populist discussion of the issues thus far. It is not productive to take as a starting point the view that:

> "An unacknowledged animus against boys is loose [Sunday Telegraph 9-7-00]",

> or that, "There was a time when masculinity was considered a virtue. Now it seems like an obstacle to be overcome [North Shore Times, 5-7-00]".

The fundamental position of this submission is that there are fundamental reconsiderations of what it is to be a male [and indeed, a female] in our society and economy and that these reconsiderations are having various manifestations within education. This reconstruction of what it is to be a boy and a man is proving very challenging and difficult for many people and educators have some capacity to address the needs of male students in a time of transition. Educational institutions can only do so much however as what is occurring is largely caused by, and exacerbated by, developments beyond schools and colleges.

Educators can however continue to develop for boys and girls practices around varied pedagogies which allow for the different learning styles of students. This does not constitute an advocacy for a view that there is a male learning style or a female leaning style but rather it seeks an intensification of research, and training and development processes which facilitate inclusive classroom practices which allow for individual students to learn in their own style.

Federal and state education authorities have a responsibility therefore to give greater emphasis to pedagogy within their training and funding emphases and to ensure that pre-service and in-service training takes account of the theory and practice around different learning styles. Systems also have a responsibility to train teachers in the special difficulties boys and girls are likely to encounter at different stages of their development and to develop whole-system responses to meet the needs of males and females.

We can also seek to further establish alternative models of male endeavour beyond the existing media stereotypes so that we can as an education system extend the range of human possibility for males as they move through various stages of maturation. It is essential for boys and girls to have educational settings which show and model adult females and males in different roles, circumstances and positions of authority.

We have an opportunity to question conventional male and female stereotypes and to encourage our young to see the infinite combinations of the intellectual, social, emotional, physical and spiritual which they can grow towards in their human development. We should, "Raise awareness among boys and teachers about the many ways of being a man". Concomitantly, however, we must also explore the many possibilities of womanhood that the future might hold.

A successful strategy in Boys' Education must be about building a future rather than mourning a past that will not be returning.

Governments and policy-makers must also be aware that education regimes which encourage and celebrate an excessive attachment to marks, comparisons, league tables, blaming and shaming, and extremes of competitiveness invariably leads to the creation of outgroups, "losers", the sense of failure and feelings of human futility and the lack of self-worth and self-esteem.

The current focus is on boys yet the culture of fierce competition within and between schools and systems creates a whole generation of youngsters whose sense of "failure" is made conspicuous by thoughtless government policy and mindless media reportage. Much of what the current Inquiry seeks to explore has its roots in the social, economic and educational policies facilitated by all major political parties in recent times which have given a more ruthless and less compassionate edge to our entire society. Governments can not continue to pursue such policies and then deplore the human consequences of such policies on our young.

Key Recommendations

1. Initiatives must be supported by a fully funded, free, quality public education system.

2. This organisation does not endorse the introduction of a separate boys' education policy. *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* already provides an appropriate national policy framework for addressing the educational needs of boys. However, adequate resources to support initiatives consistent with the principles for action and strategic directions outlined in the framework must be made available.

3. Despite the acceptance by all state and territory Ministers of Education of *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools,* there has been limited implementation of the strategies contained therein. In fact, resources (human and other) deployed to address girls' identified disadvantages have been largely removed. The limited, existing resources and initiatives working to address girls' disadvantages need to be maintained and, indeed, increased. This organisation refers the Committee to the full document, *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* and strongly recommends its full implementation.

4. The re-establishment of a national advisory body on gender equity. (Similar in composition to MCEETYA which operated until 1997).

5. Boys' and girls' education initiatives must be regarded as parallel priorities and take place within a "whole school approach" to gender equity, ie. there is no educational or social justification for introduction of a separate and exclusive boys' education policy. More strong girls does not mean more weak boys.

6. This organisation calls for the development of a "social construction of gender" resource kit utilising a whole school approach to assist schools in implementing a response to social and educational issues relating to girls, boys and education. Such a kit would ideally be developed by DETYA working with the AEU and the teaching profession and be supported by adequate professional development initiatives within the school community.

7. Following this Professional Development, all schools develop, implement and monitor a Gender Equity Plan for their school by working with their teacher union and the school community.

8. That further research into the interconnections between gender, race and ethnicity, rural/isolation and socio-economic status (SES) factors which influence school and posts-school experiences and outcomes for boys and girls be commissioned.

9. That DETYA, in consultation with AEU and other relevant organisations, establish research and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of intervention strategies and programs introduced to improve the school and post-school experiences and outcomes for boys and girls.

10. That the delivery of pre and in-service professional development programs in gender education for teachers and teachers in training be included as a priority area for the

DETYA Quality Teaching program and like initiatives.

11.   That DETYA works with the AEU and the teaching profession to investigate curriculum practices (in the high school and post-compulsory areas) that are inclusive of gender, class and Aboriginality. Funding should be provided to disseminate this information to teachers through Professional Development programs.

12.   Given that research shows the completion of Year 12 leads to greater work and study opportunities, further investigation into the relationship between socio-economic status, gender and Year 12 completion rates needs to be identified with a view to noting learning environments, such as Year 12 programs in TAFE, that are inclusive of groups "at risk" who are excluded from mainstream education contexts.

13.   Within the Gender Equity Framework there needs to be interlocking initiatives to address the issues facing boys and girls as a result of a limited, traditional stereotype of masculinity.

14.   Within this Gender Equity Framework, which recognises the needs of girls and boys and which seeks positive outcomes for all, the following strategies are recommended:

·   a study of the social construction of gender;
·   information about a range of definitions of masculinity and "ways to be a man" in contemporary Australia;
·   a valuing of the emotional and social development of boys in addition to their intellectual development;
·   an understanding that traditional stereotypes limit life options;
·   the predominantly male issue of bullying and harassment in schools. An understanding of the harm boys and men inflict on themselves and on women and girls;
·   a focus on developing constructive conflict resolution and negotiation skills;
·   parenting and domestic skills;
·   the effect of job choice on the rest of boys' men's lives and responsibilities. The effect of not considering family, friendship and community aspects of preparing for a career.

General Recommended Approach

Research into the educational experiences and outcomes for girls and boys in Australian schools points clearly to the best approach to be taken to maximise opportunities for both sexes.

Rather than girls' and boys' education being seen as competing priorities they must be seen as intertwined and parallel priorities.

A large number of Federal and State studies have been carried out to identify the best approach to this complex issue of gender equity. Most of these studies were carried out by bodies with representatives from government, teacher unions, parents, academics and community.

All these studies recommended a similar approach and most contained detailed strategies within them.

We list these below and strongly urge the Committee to base their recommendations on this extensive work.

- *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools 1997.* Gender Equity Taskforce, MCEETYA.

- *Girls & Boys at School: Gender Equity Strategy 1996 - 2001.*

- *Gender and School Education.* 1996 Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs.

- Papers from MCEETYA "Promoting Gender Equity Conference" Canberra 1995.

- Who wins at School? Boys and Girls in Australian Secondary Education, - Prof. Richard Teese, Melbourne University [Project funded by Department of Employment, Education & Training through the Projects of National Significance and the Curriculum Development Projects Program].

- *Men Engaging Feminisms: Pro-Feminism, Back lashes and Schooling*, published in the Feminist Educational Thinking series by Open University Press. Allen & Union 1999

- *New Agendas: Girls, Boys and Equity - A Practical Resource for use in schools.* New South Wales Teachers Federation.

- *Gender Equity Framework Action Plan*, MCEETYA - AEU (South Australia)

- *Gender Equity Resources in New South Wales Primary Schools* (See Appendix 2)

- *Factors Influencing the Educational Performances of Males and Females* - DETYA August 2000.

Detail of recommended approach;

"Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools"

This Framework was developed by the MCEETYA Gender Equity Taskforce in collaboration with a wide range of groups, organisations and communities.(Particularly including the partnership between schools and parents).

This 1996 Framework remains the best and most comprehensive analysis and plan for dealing with gender equity in education.

The Framework contains five Strategic Directions: (See Appendix 3 - Five Strategic Directions with Outcomes and Indicators of Improvement in *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools)*

1.   Understanding the process of Gender Construction.
2.   Curriculum, teaching and learning.
3.   Violence and school culture.
4.   Post-school pathways.
5.   Supporting change.

Each of these has a detailed set of Outcomes included along with a list of Indicators of Improvement.

There is also a set of Principles for Action from this document which needs to be enacted:

Gender Equity in Schooling

Principles for Action

The principles for action have been developed to encapsulate best practice in education for all students, and to link the best practice to the demands of a vigorous and changing community. These principles draw upon current understandings of the issues which are central to gender equity and are the foundation for *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools.*

1.   Equitable access to an effective and rewarding education, which is enhanced rather than limited by definitions of what it means to be female and male, should be provided to all girls and boys.

2.   Girls and boys should be equipped to participate actively in a contemporary society which is characterised by changing patterns of working, civic and domestic life.

3.   Schools should be places in which girls and boys feel safe, are safe, and where they are respected and valued.

4.   Schools should acknowledge their active role in the construction of gender, and their responsibility to ensure that all organisational and management practices reflect commitment to gender equity.

5. Understandings of gender construction should include knowledge about the relationship of gender to other factors, including socio-economic status, cultural background, rural/urban location, disability and sexuality.

6. Understanding and accepting that there are many ways of being masculine and feminine will assist all students to reach their full potential.

7. Effective partnerships between schools, education and training systems, parents, the community, and a range of other agencies and organisations, will contribute to improvement and change in educational outcomes for girls and boys.

8. Intervention programs and processes should be targeted towards increasing options, levels of participation and outcomes of schooling for girls and boys.

9. Anti-discrimination and other relevant legislation at state, territory, federal and international levels should inform educational programs and services.

10. Continuous monitoring of educational outcomes and program review should inform and enhance decisions on the development, resourcing and delivery of effective and rewarding education for girls and boys.

> **Thus, the material exists to guide the Committee in its present deliberations.**
>
> **We seek an assurance that the initiatives contained in *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* will be resourced, implemented and monitored. This document has not been implemented in any substantial manner.**

Gender construction

Gender Equity focuses on the development of positive constructions of both masculinity and femininity.

These positive constructions should redress the power dynamics which traditionally exist between men and women, boys and girls.

Understanding of the process of gender construction is crucial if schools and systems are to truly work towards more equitable and improved educational outcomes for girls and boys. Dominant concepts of masculinity and femininity define males and females as opposites by focussing on their differences and assigning them unequal value, status and power.

Dominant masculinity is defined by traditional notions of aggression, competition and attitudes to women based on inequality and a man's right to control and have power over women. However, this dominant masculinity is not pre-determined or an in-built characteristic of men. Rather, men are actively involved in the construction of their own masculinities as are women constructing their own femininities". (Ollis and Tomaszewski, Gender and Violence Project, 1992).

This construction of gender varies over cultures and over time. It is also, clearly, influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, disability, sexuality and rural/urban location. (Collins 1997).

According to Kenway (1991), masculinity, for example, is being constructed in a range of social settings and these settings offer a range of ways of being male (or female), separately and together, with some considered superior to others. Connell (1989) argues that it would be misleading, however, to see gender construction as a 'free choice of gender styles'. Rather, he argues, 'These choices are strongly structured on relations of power' (p.295).

Through their everyday behaviours, girls and boys begin to learn their 'place' in an unequal society where 'masculine' characteristics, including the exercise of power and dominance, are valued for men, and 'feminine' characteristics, such as service, nurturing and intuitive reasoning are devalued.

The current hierarchy of subjects with Mathematics and Science at the top has devalued the traditional 'female' subjects. Schools need to reconsider practices which allocate greater or lesser importance to subjects, depending on whether they are seen as 'girls' subjects or 'boys' subjects. It is important to foster opportunities which expand options for girls, and at the same time avoid practices which endorse unequal relations between the sexes.

Although there have been some improvements for girls as a result of enormous efforts by educators and systems over a number of years, it is important to note that equity for girls has not been achieved just because some (mostly higher SES background) girls now participate in higher levels of Maths, Science or Technology subjects or are retained at school for a longer time.

Gender equity initiatives in schools should include opportunities for boys to discuss what it means to be a male in today's society and to discuss the ways in which society shapes gender expectations for both boys and girls. The limiting, and often damaging, effect of dominant, traditional masculinity needs to be discussed and analysed. This limiting or damaging effect can include:

· 	the perception that masculinity equals toughness;
· 	the perception that academic success (especially in "feminine" subjects such as English/Literacy) is "uncool";
· 	high levels of harassment and bullying towards boys who differ from the dominant, masculine stereotype;
· 	high levels of harassment towards girls;
· 	risk-taking, self-damaging behaviour such as unsafe driving, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide.

Gender construction awareness needs to run through the teaching and systems of schools, including:

·   development and use of curriculum material (e.g. to include positive examples of women);
·   teaching methods (boys are often still receiving the majority of the teachers attention and time);
·   girls' passivity and "invisibility" and the damaging effects of such behaviour.
·   use of playground space (boys disproportionately occupy the space);
·   allocation and use of resources, e.g. computers, sporting and technological;
·   encouragement of girls in sport, particularly during adolescence and beyond;
·   girls' selection of subjects and post-school pathways (Australia remains the most sex-segregated workforce in the OECD);
·   girls' mental health (including anorexia and self-harm);
·   eliminating sex-based harassment in schools;
·   addressing lack of women in promotion positions in schools.

Debunking the feminist damage myth

Although there are very concerning aspects of boys behaviour and lack of engagement with school, there is no considered, detailed research that indicates that these problems have worsened over time or are a result of some over-emphasis on girls' education as a result of feminism.

From 1916 onwards (NSW data) girls have consistently recorded superior outcomes to boys at the Leaving Level and have outperformed boys at Year 12 from 1946 onwards (Australian Secondary Principals Association Inc. Submission to Education of Boys Inquiry 2000).

In 1693 John Locke was bewailing the fact that "boys had such trouble learning Latin, while girls took so easily to French" (Canberra Times, 28 June, 2000). Similarly, a schools inquiry in 1868 commented "Girls come to you to learn, boys have to be driven" (Canberra Times, 28 June, 2000).

The issue of boys being slower to achieve similar literacy levels to girls in the early years is not new. What is new is the greater public scrutiny and parental anxiety about what is happening (Yates Submission to Education of Boys Inquiry 2000).

Another myth which cannot be substantiated is the myth of the "feminisation of teaching and schools".

"The use of the word "feminisation" of the teaching profession can be misleading. Certainly the majority of the workers in the system are female and the percentage is growing. Women, however, are under-represented in the positions of management in the schools and systems. The fact that women have always been under-represented in areas of the senior management means that they have had little influence and control over policy directions, the informal and formal curriculum, the allocation of resources and the appointment and promotion of staff. With women making only very slow inroads into positions of senior management, and in some cases no movement, the education system remains in the control of men." *"A Class Act -- An Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession"*

"Referring to education in total as a feminised industry tends to disguise the actual gender segregation within the industry and the reality of women's positions within it.

This position has been accurately described by Sandra Milligan (et al.) in the report, "Women in the Teaching Profession":

> *"The school sector workforce has been and remains highly gender segregated. The workforce is becoming more feminised; men continue to predominate in management, in teaching older students, in subject areas such as manual arts, and as gardeners and maintenance workers; women continue to predominate as teachers and as teacher-aides, especially in the earlier years of schooling, in certain subject areas, and in working with migrant and special education students....women remain heavily under-represented in school leadership and promotional positions, and the improvement in their position is very slow." (1994, p.45)*

So while the majority of employees in the schools sector are women, they are concentrated in the lowest paid pockets within the industry and indeed are not proportionately represented in key decision-making structures within schools or the system.

We can add to this the fact that women are disproportionately concentrated in positions which are precarious in nature, ie. where ongoing security is threatened by ie. contract/limited tenure style arrangements and where conditions are not equivalent to permanent/full-time colleagues.

Unfortunately the media and some politicians have focussed on a narrow argument that increasing the number of male teachers will improve status. Previous experience shows that will not ensure that the pattern of gender segregation within the industry is altered, or that the status of the profession will be changed. For example, from 1969 through the 1970s in New South Wales and Queensland, teaching scholarships were distributed on a preferential basis to male students in order to increase men's participation rates within public education. What occurred, however, was a loss of these male graduates over time to other more lucrative positions elsewhere. In addition, affirmative action strategies for the appointment of male teachers have often seen these teachers move quickly (faster than their female counterparts) through to promotional positions within the system and away from classroom teaching roles". *(AEU Submission to Inquiry into the Status of*

Teachers 1997)".

Women comprise over 70 per cent of the teaching workforce across Australia; however, an analysis of the positions that women hold demonstrates the gender segregation within the workforce.

The following tables provide an overview of the situation for women in promotion positions in Australia's public school systems.

ACT	
Promotions Position/Classification	**% Women**
Level 2 (All Sectors)	14.3
Level 3 (All Sectors)	2.2
Level 4 (All Sectors)	2.32

NSW	
Position/Classification	**% Women**
Pre-School and Kindergarten To Year 6	
Non-promoted	80.0
Executive Teacher	7.1
Assistant Principal	7.4
Deputy Principal	1.1
Primary Principal Class 6	0.5
Primary Principal Class 5	0.9
Primary/Central Principal Class 4	0.8
Primary/Central Principal Class 3	0.8
Primary/Central Principal Class 2	0.4
Primary/Central Principal Class 1	0.1
Secondary Sector	
Non-promoted	68.0
Promoted	32.0

QUEENSLAND	
Position/Classification	**% Women**

Band 6 (4 teacher/principal school/or
                     primary deputy
                     position)
	50.26

Band 7 (teaching principal/ secondary deputy	43.64
Band 8 (non teaching principal primary/secondary)	19.87
Band 9 (primary/secondary)	13.4
Band 10 (primary/secondary)	5.7
Band 11 (secondary/principal)	17.14

SOUTH AUSTRALIA	
Position/Classification	**% Women**
Key Teacher	75.0
Seconded Teacher	63.0
Principal - Primary	33.0
Principal - Secondary	37.0
Principal - Junior Primary	81.0
Deputy Principal	38.0

TASMANIA	
Position/Classification	**% Women**
Promotional Positions	
AST2-3	29.09
Principal 1-3	7.11
Principal 4-7	4.58

VICTORIA	
Position/Classification	**% Women**
Primary Teacher Class	84.0
Promotional Positions	
AST Band 4	64.0
Principal/Assistant Principal/Head Teacher	34.0
SSTS	69.0
Secondary Teacher Class	55.0
Promotional Positions	
AST Band 4	41.0
Principal/Assistant Principal/Head Teacher	25.0
SSTS	60.0

WESTERN AUSTRALIA	
Position/Classification	**% Women**
Primary Sector	77.0
Secondary Sector	50.0
Education Support Sector	84.0
Promotional Positions Levels 1- 2	73.0
Promotional Positions Levels 3 - 6	25.0

From *The Status of Teachers,* (Joyce Marshall, 1998).

It is clear from Submissions posted on the website of the Committee for this Inquiry that this debate could become a divisive one and pit boys against girls. There is also the tendency for an attack on girls and women teachers and in fact, public education. (Delamont 2000).

A backlash against measures to "even up things" for girls is evident. There seems to be an "attempted reclamation by men of their social power which they had not really lost anyway". (Lingard et al 1999).
What has been done for girls was necessary and just. And it needs to continue.

It is also "grossly exaggerated". (Kenway et al 1997). <u>Some</u> girls have improved their life chances, many have not and when gender is linked with socio-economic status it is very clear that low SES impacts badly for girls and boys.

Many boys and men do not see themselves as powerful and, it is true, that the return from the patriarchal dividend is very different for varying groups of boys and men (Lingard et al 1999). It is clear that, as identified in the recent DETYA 2000 report "Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School" the emphasis of any actions and recommendations needs to be heavily influenced by socio-economic status considerations, ie. "which boys and which girls" should be an important over-riding concern of the Committee for the Inquiry into the Education of Boys.

Boys are not a single group: socio-economic status, race and ethnicity

Recent research has pointed to the overarching significance of socio-economic status (SES) for school participation and performance. (Collins, Kenway and McLeod 2000)

It is also necessary to investigate the effects of other significant factors, such as geographic location, (dis)ability, sexuality, race and ethnicity and how they intersect with gender.

The situation for indigenous boys remains particularly severe. Lowitja O'Donohue , at the recent Inaugural ACTU Women's Congress, pointed out that in a number of communities the unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth is almost 50%. Any plan for the Education of Boys will need to address the disadvantages still faced by our original inhabitants. The Committee is referred to Appendix 4 - AEU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy 1995.

There is a need to develop within a public education system, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, educational authorities and the relevant unions, culturally sensitive, flexible teaching and learning environments that best suit the needs of Aboriginal students, their parents/caregivers and their community. It is important to note that a key to create educational improvements for Aboriginal students is an ongoing, inclusive and respectful dialogue between Aboriginal communities and the other participants. Also integral is the acknowledgement that language and cultural knowledge of Aboriginal people has status with academic qualifications.

Too often Aboriginal students have reduced access to educational opportunity and lack of respect for their language and cultural knowledge. The AEU is committed to achieving equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students based on preserving diverse Aboriginal culture and acknowledges that "any equity of outcomes for Aboriginal students and communities can only be achieved by a strong, well resourced and freely available public education system".

There is also a very clear gap between different groups of boys. In terms of educational participation, there is a 30% difference between boys of professional/managerial backgrounds and those from unskilled backgrounds. Boys from privileged urban backgrounds are achieving better educational outcomes than most girls (and boys) from rural areas, ATSI backgrounds and non-English speaking backgrounds (Boulden and Parker, 1998). Boys with the highest SES ranking also do much better than girls with the lowest SES ranking. (Alloway and Gilbert, 1998).

Girls from lower status backgrounds continue to be especially disadvantaged. (Teese, 1996). The problems of rural and remote youth are well documented and need to be considered. The Committee is referred to Appendix 5 - AEU Policy on Education in Rural Areas 1989.

Federal and State government educational strategies must ensure allocation of resources to ensure all students have access to educational opportunity.

There needs to be an increase in funding programs that create improvements for rural and isolated students such as the Country Assistance Program (CAP). Too often students outside metropolitan areas face reduced access to services and educational provision. The AEU supports many of the recommendations from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HEROC) Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education, specifically the maintenance and enhancement of CAP.

There also needs to be an increase in funding for programs that create improvements for students from low socio-economic status (SES) environments. Too often students of low socio-economic status have reduced access to educational opportunity. Hence the AEU encourages the Federal Government to reintroduce funding of the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP).

Rural, remote and urban localities have high concentrations of poverty and disadvantage for both sexes (school participation and subject performance). However, seven years after leaving school, boys from rural schools are much more likely to be employed full-time than the girls.

Further research is needed to tease out further the inter-relation of these forces. However it is clear that, as a starting point, any educational initiative around gender equity must also take into account socio-economic status. The Committee is also referred to Appendix 6 - AEU Youth Policy "Standing with the Young" 2000.

The culture of masculinity in schools and its' effects

It is clear that the best organisational culture to assist learning is one of respect, safety and tolerance. The dominant masculine culture in schools, on the other hand, is one of disruptive and dominating behaviour by many boys. This culture is one that disadvantages not only girls but also the boys who do not fit the traditional, stereotyped construction of masculinity. (MCEETYA, Gender Equity : A Framework, 1996).

Many boys and most girls still experience gendered violence and sex-based harassment in schools. This impact is intensified for some students on the basis of sexuality, disability and cultural background.

Any initiatives in the area of boys' education need to include an analysis of the negative effects of much of the behaviour which is associated with this dominant masculinity. This shows up in damage which is done by boys to themselves as well as to other boys and, certainly, damage done to girls. There needs to be a whole school approach to identifying and eliminating gendered violence in the lives of students.

Such an approach must be informed by an analysis of the process of gender construction and an understanding of the limiting effects of dominant masculinity. For an educational environment

which is enabling for the majority of students there needs to be respect for a wide definition of masculinity. There needs to be a range of ways of "being a man" explored and supported.

A narrow, stereotyped definition of masculinity is often played out in homophobic behaviour in a school. Such behaviour has a serious effect on all students, especially on young males, whatever their sexual orientation. It plays an important role in bullying and harassment in peer groups. It limits boys' choice of subjects, how they apply themselves in class and their expression of emotions. (Plummer, 1999, 2000).

Homophobia also exerts its influence by pressuring men and boys toward high-risk behaviour. For example, taking part in gangs or driving cars dangerously. Homophobia can be very isolating and its effects can show up in youth suicide. The effects can also show up in truancy, feelings of low self-worth and general anti-social behaviour. (Yates, 2000).

Homophobia can be said to be the guiding force in construction of gender in late primary schooling (Plummer 2000), and boys become very aware that any behaviour outside the dominant male culture will risk their being labelled as "the other". Once boys, whatever their sexuality, are labelled in this manner they often find themselves in a discriminatory, difficult environment which can affect their learning and development. The committee is referred to Appendix 7 - AEU Policy on Sexual Orientation and Gender Preferred Identity 1995.

Unless attempts are made to explicitly address the role that sexuality and homophobia play in boys' lives, many of the social and educational problems they face will persist. (Beckett, 1998). Boys learn to police and regulate their masculinity in light of the power that accrues to the dominant masculinity.

Whilst boys suicide rates remain very concerning it is important to note that the rate of **attempted** suicide is higher for girls than boys. Boys are more successful because they choose more violent means(eg. guns and hanging compared with pills). Girls' at-risk behaviour often does not show up as it is self-directed and often involves anorexia, bulimia or self-mutilation.

The effect of dominant masculinity also shows up significantly in boys lack of engagement and involvement in literacy. (Alloway and Gilbert, 1998). Boys' lack of success in this area can, at least partly, be traced to a turning away from this area as not fitting the dominant masculinity. "English" and reading, in particular, are often seen as "feminine" subjects and therefore as alienating for boys and at odds with their adolescent and developing sense of masculine identity. (Martino 1994). There is considerable evidence that to be good at English can make a male student a target for homophobic bullying by "macho" males in schools. (Gilbert 1997).

The whole area of gender construction and the effects of narrow, dominant masculinity need to inform any approach to initiatives in the area of Education of Boys.

It is important that a full understanding of the situation facing young women and men is what is used as the basis for any action for girls or boys in schools. It is clear that the issues are complex and that much effort is needed if young people are to reach their full potential.

Boys, literacy and learning

The focus of the Inquiry is early and middle years of schooling. It is clear that gender construction happens in early and middle years and that gender equity initiatives for boys (and girls) would do well to focus on this area.

A continuing anxiety played out in the populist media is a perceived "lowering of standards" for literacy and numeracy in Australia across time. Research shows, in fact, that there has been little overall change in average levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy over the period 1975 to 1995 (ACER 1997). Over this time boys have maintained their advantage in numeracy and girls have maintained their advantage in literacy. (ACER 1997). Clearly, any initiatives focussing on boys and literacy would only be justifiable if initiatives were also carried out for girls and numeracy.

The data from this comprehensive ACER survey shows that, for boys and girls, it is the **socio-economic status that plays a major determining role in level of achievement in both numeracy and literacy**. This finding resonates with the recent DETYA 2000 Report "Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School" and clearly points the Committee toward the centrality of SES as the major determinant of any initiatives in the gender equity area.

Not all boys have poor performances; some groups of boys and some groups of girls can be identified as experiencing significant difficulty. Rural Aboriginal girls, and working class girls from non-English speaking backgrounds do less well than some groups of boys. It is also well known through other assessment programs that poor students have significant difficulty with literacy acquisition. The results for the national standardised tests currently sponsored by MCEETYA need to be disaggregated by economic status to complete the picture of which groups of boys and girls need assistance with literacy. While gender is certainly a factor affecting literacy results, so too is ethnicity, Aboriginality, rurality and socio- economic status. Nicholls (1995) notes that a disproportionate number of boys who are identified for special help are boys who come from low socio-economic status backgrounds. She suggest that (referring to US data) "The problems for black and working class boys are being used as evidence that boys as a whole suffer from learning difficulties which are not being sufficiently well addressed by the current school system".

Testing

A factor which needs to be borne in mind in the interpretation of literacy tests is the limitation of the test technologies. Only some forms of literate knowledge are assessed in such tests. Many forms of literacy cannot be easily assessed by standardised, computer-marked, national tests; for example, the many different media forms of literacy used in a range of sites cannot be assessed by tests. For boys in particular this is probably significant. There are other literacy sites and forms of literacy that are not easily tested eg. functional social literacy in its popular and contemporary genres.

It is also clear that girls' "advantage" in literacy does not translate into any long-term advantage. Girls with very high literacy (measured at age 14) could expect to earn less at age 19 than19 year old men with the same skills. (ACER 1997). In fact, young men designated as having low and very low literacy levels were still able to earn more than young women who had very high levels of literacy achievement. Thus it would seem that school success in literacy does **not**

automatically translate into economic advantage for girls and disadvantage for boys. In other words, how significant is the "boys and literacy" crisis for boys' future?

It is also clear that boys in high SES brackets do better in literacy than girls in low SES brackets. (Alloway and Gilbert 1998) and that there is a larger gap in literacy achievement between **boys** of high SES and low SES than girls of the same group. Clearly, socio-economic status is a major determinant (for boys and girls) of literacy and numeracy.

Indeed, if achievement in the new areas of computer and technical literacy is considered it could be that boys are moving ahead of girls (Lingard et al 1999).

School literacy programs

For a long time schools have tried to address the literacy and literature needs of boys. Considerable school resources have been allocated nationally to early intervention programs and literacy support programs throughout the years of schooling in which boys dominate; many text selections for such programs and for general classroom programs are often focussed on males as the chief story protagonists and on narrative content seen to be of interest to boys.

It could be argued that the ways in which boys' literacy needs have been addressed have often been ineffectual because they have not taken sufficient account of gender construction -- that is, these strategies have not often attempted to engage with the experiences of masculinity such readers bring with them, or to critically reflect on how the literacy classroom might conflict with social constructions of masculinity. Ways to "do" masculinity are much more likely to be found in sport, electronic and gaming magazines than in novels and in multimedia net-surfing.

Another interesting result is that boys do better in literacy with a female teacher (Lingard et al 1999). This has been suggested and reflect differences between female and male pedagogy in reading.

> "In New Zealand, female teachers more often assessed pupils' lower-order skills (for example, work recognition, vocabulary) than male teachers, they more often taught pupils how to read expository texts and documents, and they were somewhat less likely to view reading instruction as requiring systematic progression through graded materials. Female teachers were also more likely to have a classroom library and to have a greater number of reading materials in class". (Wilkinson 1997)

The second explanation considered by Wilkinson is the 'maturational hypothesis', which suggests that different maturational stages between boys and girls explain these early gender differences in reading performance. Wilkinson (1997: 2) notes that in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study, New Zealand was only one of three countries where school began at age five and that in all three systems there were very substantial differences in favour of girls in terms of reading performance. A recent evaluation of the Year 2 Reading Net in Queensland has shown how many teachers believe the greater numbers of boys than girls being picked up by the net for remediation can be explained by this maturational hypothesis. (A. Luke et al. 1997).

It is also clear that class size affects student learning in the early years and for disadvantaged students (Cuttance and Stokes 1997). Class sizes of 20 or fewer students lead to a "substantial impact" on achievement for students in the early years of schooling or for the education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those in need of special learning support. (Cuttance and Stokes 1997).

Fathers and literacy

In many families child rearing practices are gendered ie. mothers and fathers often share their parenting responsibilities by performing distinctly different tasks determined by their gender. Fathers are often not observed by their young children as literate role models, and further if they do, it is often that fathers are observed as functional readers rather than readers of literature. Australian research (Nichols, 1994, 1995) demonstrates that literacy is clearly linked with mothers and with women, that fathers often identify themselves as non-readers, and that a "negative identification with reading was associated with a positive identification with perceived masculine activities and qualities".

The implications of this for boys learning to read are clear. Boys' earliest experiences of reading, of literacy and of the home-school nexus are likely to be associated with their mothers, rather than with their fathers -- with femininity and the female, rather than with masculinity and the male. Thus the construction of gender for many boys includes the belief that to be male does not include an enjoyment of reading, of literature in particular. In schooling this is demonstrated by a reluctance to engage with school literacy tasks, a lack of interest in reading and frequent disruptive behaviour in literacy classes.

Some schools have attempted to redress the lack of involvement of fathers with their sons (and daughters) by the introduction of programs, e.g. *Real Men Read* (Mulligan 2000) which invites fathers into the classroom to read to students.

The research has shown that dominant masculinity impacts in significant ways on boys' engagement and involvement in literacy (Martino 1994, Millard 1997, Hall and Coles 1997, Gilbert 1998). The focus needs to be on an exploration of the ways in which literacy, as a social practice, is inscribed in schools and the role that a particular form of masculinity plays in many boys' rejection of literacy as sex-inappropriate. For instance, Martino's (1994) research has highlighted that many boys see English as a subject more suited to girls and claimed that they would rather be out playing sport than reading etc. However, this does not mean advocating a simplistic solution of offering more boy-friendly texts or separating boys from girls in English so that their interests can be catered for more explicitly. This has the capacity of merely reinforcing the very dominant masculinity that is detrimental to boys developing a wider repertoire of acting, behaving and relating as boys. However, as Hall and Coles (in press) have argued, schools need to examine the kinds of literacy practices that are sanctioned and to incorporate texts which are cultural to the worlds inhabited by students outside of the classroom. They argue for the need to incorporate popular cultural texts into the classroom and to investigate the range of literacy practices that boys are already engaging in outside of school. Martino (in press) has also argued that it is important to select texts which are culturally relevant to students in the teaching of reading. Some boys in his research indicated that the books set for class reading were boring and somehow removed from their everyday life experiences. They asked for reading material which focussed on a more realistic portrayal of relationships and

which addressed some of the problems and issues faced by young people in a post-industrial, post-modern world.

The issue of pedagogy and its effects on learning outcomes also needs to be addressed in the context of the education of boys. It is clear that active, democratic learning is most effective for most students. The AEU has extensive policy in the Curriculum area and the Committee is referred to this information at Appendix 8 - AEU Policy on Curriculum 1993.

Curriculum documents and the value placed on different curriculum areas are other important factors that must be considered.

Curriculum documents may seem to be gender neutral, and may sometimes include statements about gender equity in their application. However, they commonly reflect the fact that almost all areas of study exclude or trivialise women's contributions, experiences or knowledge.

Curriculum reform requires a fundamental reworking of what knowledge is valued in the curriculum, how it is made available (ie, placement on timetabling lines, competition with other subjects, etc,) and how it is taught.

The AEU recommends that any renewed focus on literacy and boys be one that dissects discourse on gender, literacy and schooling and considers how constructions of English literacy sit beside boys' lived experiences of masculinity, and how the ways in which boys "do" and "perform" gender could be in conflict with literacy practices and pedagogy. Professor Pam Gilbert (1998) argues that "we are unlikely to make any difference to the boys and literacy issue, unless a close and careful examination of the social and embodied practices of masculinities, and of the social construction of literacy and literacy testing become part of classroom learning".

In addition she emphasises that boys "deserve access to knowledge about their social construction as gendered subjects, about the curriculum processes they are inserted into, and about the ways in which they might position themselves differently in a range of social contexts". In other words boys need to be let into the secret of how society constructs them as masculine and how this affects their life.

Good teachers, not necessarily male teachers

Another misguided concern often raised in the context of boys' education is the lack of male teachers and the impact this has on boys.

A National Inquiry into the Status of Teachers was conducted in 1997 and its results and findings were published in "A Class Act" March 1998. The Committee's view was strongly that the profession should be attempting to attract the "best and most suitable people into the profession, regardless of gender. If teachers mirror more accurately the society in which they operate -- in terms of gender, class and ethnicity -- so much the better. But teaching ability must remain the primary consideration" (p. 123). The Committee felt that the focus should be on re-establishing and reasserting the value of education and of those who practice it, and of recognising and rewarding the skills good teachers bring to their task.

The so-called "feminisation of the profession and schools" has already been dealt with in this submission. Suffice to say that, with the decision-makers in schools and the bureaucracy being predominantly male, it is hard to fathom such a statement.

The preponderance of male role models throughout the media, business and society is another factor to consider in rebutting any statements of a lack of influence by males on boys in schools.

Dominant masculinity saturates the world of boys (and girls).

A useful contribution could be to encourage men into early years teaching and counselling/student welfare areas.

Excellent teaching style is not dictated by gender. Rather, it is made up of certain attitudes and abilities and includes the following:

· understanding of gender construction and its impact on students and teachers;
· actively and democratically involving students in their own learning;
· providing for a range of learning styles;
· being explicit about the outcomes they are working towards, and the criteria they will apply for assessment;
· confronting dominating, disruptive and harassing behaviour;
· ensuring all students can take an active part in class discussions, express feelings and take risks without fear of being considered to be 'wrong';
· encouraging students to compete against themselves rather than against others;
· allow students to have some control over the pace and direction of their learning;
· encouraging students to support each other in their learning.

Research has found that the sex of the role model is less important than the modelled behaviour.

For male teachers to be effective in promoting appropriate behaviour in boys:

· they need to understand the construction of gender and motivations for violence, and
· be trained in explicit ways to intervene to deal with inappropriate behaviour.

The AEU believes that active involvement in challenging sex-role stereotyping is essential for both male and female teachers and that a diversity of skilled staff including those in authority positions in schools is the key to legitimising a range of gender identities.

The following was submitted to this inquiry by the Queensland Teachers Union and is re-submitted here in light of its importance:

The role of the teacher

Teachers have a vital role to play in showing boys how dominant masculinities constrain as much as advantage them. They need to be shown how these images are established and maintained, at what cost this happens and how widening their understanding of what it means to be male can lead to more diverse experiences and positive relationships with others.

As masculinities are not uniform no single approach will address all issues for all boys. However, a combination of the following strategies should be used:

· reflection on boys' own personal experience to allow them to think through beliefs and practices;

· training in alternative skills eg. rehearsal of effective tactics to use in violent confrontations other than retaliatory violence;

· exploration of how boys feel about their relationships with others, self-concept, self-esteem and self-confidence. The emphasis should be on feeling good about themselves and seeing why certain ways of being male are desirable, why anxiety may lead them to conform to more rigid models and how this rigidity can be ultimately harmful;

· encouragement of activities which are co-operative rather than competitive, eg. community projects;

· recognition of the symptoms of abuse, harassment and bullying, eg:
  - depression,
  - low self-esteem,
  - withdrawn behaviour,
  - inability to make friends,
  - school absences,
  - non-assertive defensive behaviour,
  - reluctance to challenge the statements or authority of others,
  - eating disorders.

Teachers must also reflect on their disciplinary methods and consider whether they are modelling the behaviours about which they are critical, e.g. domination and harassment. For this reason sarcasm, shouting, physical punishment and bullying need to be avoided.

Inservice education for Teachers

Some excellent education kits on creating non-violent school communities have been produced.

These include:

·   The "No Fear" kits (one for primary, and one for secondary schools), published in 1995 by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training; and

·   "Enough's Enough" for primary schools, published in 1994 by the Department of Education, Queensland.

However, the production of such kits without a sustained program of facilitated inservice has not had widespread effect. The Australian Education Union would recommend that such a sustained program be put in place as a matter of priority and that it be targeted at whole school communities (not individual teachers). Such an inservice program would complement the Commonwealth Government's focus on the prevention of domestic violence. (QTU Submission to EOB Inquiry)

The proposition that boys will achieve better outcomes with male teachers is not supported by research. In 1999 DETYA funded the Successful Interventions Project to assess which intervention programs demonstrated the best improvement in student literacy and numeracy. The key findings were consistent with the Quality Schools Project and MYRAD data. **It is the quality of the relationship each student establishes with their teacher that has the greatest impact on student success.** The quality of the relationship is more important than either the specific intervention strategy adopted or the gender of the teacher.

Male teachers are less likely to implement gender-inclusive strategies and are less attentive to the needs of "at risk" boys. (Gender and School Education Report, p.143).

The issue of professional development in the whole area of gender construction and gender equity is also important.

The Gender and School Education Report indicated that less than fifty percent of teachers had undertaken any professional development in this area.

Clearly, any initiatives aimed at gender equity and involving schools and teachers will require adequate professional development, with appropriate time release, for teachers.

The issue of lack of a male father figure is often raised by proponents of a simplistic, separate boys' education policy.

However, early childhood training shows clearly that it is not the presence of a male around the house that has the positive impact. Rather, it is the presence of stable, committed, loving, secure and informed caregivers which is crucial. Unfortunately, in many instances, it is the actual presence of fathers that can be a problem for boys – physical and sexual abuse, neglect, emotional inaccessibility and teaching that maleness equals control, coolness and competition.

Girls remain disadvantaged

Analysis of school data for girls and boys shows that severe problems still exist for girls, despite extensive initiatives by Federal and State Governments, teacher unions and other groups,

including parents.

The claim that state and territory education systems and schools have chronically ignored the educational needs of boys and failed to implement appropriate programs cannot be sustained. The **Gender and School Education** report found that nationally, similar percentages of schools report allocating resources to programs for boys as for girls (32% respectively) with both NSW and ACT allocating more resources and programs to boys than girls overall.

Nevertheless, it is quite reasonable to assert that insufficient attention and resources have been deployed to adequately address gender equity issues for both boys and girls. This same report also highlights the low percentage of schools which have implemented **any** programs in the gender equity area (over 60% of schools nationally).

There has been a "de-focussing" on gender issues and initiatives across most education systems. The resources (human and other) which were deployed to address girls' disadvantage have been largely removed although the disadvantages faced mostly remain.

A recent study of 60,000 students in hundreds of schools looked at student achievement, background and post-schooling outcomes. ["Who Wins at School" DEET project carried out by Prof. Richard Teese, University of Melbourne 1996].

This report showed that:

·   labour market and workplace training opportunities leave girls with fewer choices than boys and pressure them to make more intense use of schools;

·   girls tend to take combinations of subjects that are "loose and irrational" such as human development, home economics and history that do not have the status or vocational emphasis that boys apply to their choices;

·   girls under-enrol in eg. higher level mathematics and boys tend to over-enrol and pay the corresponding penalty [ie. the small number of girls do disproportionately better than boys];

·   girls are more likely than boys to score highly on school conducted assessment (these are usually low-stake subjects);

·   boys do better in publicly examined subjects and this is still the primary means of selection for tertiary education.

The 2000 Report on Post-Compulsory Education in Victoria (the Kirby Report) shows that early school leavers are much worse off if they are female.

·   "Girls are at a much greater economic disadvantage if they leave school at the same time as boys" (before completing Year 12).

·   "Girls are nearly twice as likely to be working part-time" (as boys). "Boys are more than twice as likely to have a full-time job".

·   "Boys are more likely to be in training than girls".

·   More than two thirds of boys who reach the end of Year 11 go on to further study or training compared to only fifty percent of girls. These gender differences are "due in large measure to the fact that boys have much greater access to structured combinations of work and training".

·   A higher proportion of girls than boys drop out before completing Year 11.

A recent study by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) titled "The Initial Work and Educational Experiences of Early School Leavers: A Comparative Study of Australia and the United States" indicates that:

·   36% of female early school leavers do post-school education or training by 19 years of age compared to 66% of male early school leavers;

·   17% of female early school leavers spend 10 months or more unemployed and out of education and training compared to 10% of male early school leavers.

A second research project worth referring to is the DETYA 2000 "Factors influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in Schools and their initial Destination after Leaving School". This project indicates that:

·   Girls have a higher Year 12 retention rate than boys.

·   Retention rates to Year 12 have been stable since 1996, and on part with 1991 figures.

·   The average girl out-performs the average boy in Year 12 assessments in more subjects that vice versa.

·   High achievers of both genders perform about equally in Year 12 assessments.

However,

·   The performance rates in Year 12 assessments of male and female students in part relates to the results boys achieve in their preferred high status, vocationally focussed and/or traditional subjects. This is despite the knowledge that they may not do as well. This tends to drag down the males' average results due to poor all over result.

·   Boys who leave school prior to the completion of Year 12 are 4% less likely to have full-time work at around 24 years of age than their cohort who completed Year 12 but did no further study, compared to 21% of female non-completers of Year 12 and their cohort of completers.

·   Girls higher average performance overall in most subjects in Year 12 does not translate into better labour market outcomes for all girls.

The Victorian Board of Studies data for 2000 show clearly that there remains a strong gender bias across key learning areas. Boys still dominate in subjects which lead to greater vocational choice and higher paid status employment areas.

Subjects with more than 60% boys:
· 		Visual Communication and Design
· 		Outdoor Education
· 		Specialist Mathematics
· 		Physics
· 		Economics
· 		IT (Information Systems)
· 		Systems & Technology

Subjects with more than 60% girls:
· 		Studio arts
· 		Art
· 		Literature
· 		Languages
· 		Psychology
· 		Biology
· 		History

Some middle class girls are, indeed, doing better at school than previously.

Some middle -class boys are challenged by middle-class girls, even though, given the continuing gender segmentation in post-compulsory schooling this is a relatively small challenge. Instead of celebrating what might be seen as the gains of liberal feminism in education, or as others have argued, the broader impact of feminism (Moore 1996; Riddell 1998), we have a backlash in education and an attempt at reconstituting boys as the new disadvantaged.

Despite some positive gains, girls are still under-represented in the sciences and maths in the post-compulsory years, there is still a heavy gender segmentation of curriculum choice, and girls' school performances do not convert into positive post-school options in terms of careers and incomes as they do for boys. As Mahony (1997) has noted, the gendered pattern of engagement with education has not changed all that much, but now in a vastly difference political context, is read differently. The story is now one of the underachievement of boys, rather than the failure of girls to take up maths and science.

Kenway et al. (1997) also make a number of important points in relation to the politics of backlash and the specific call for more to be done for boys in education. First, they note that what has been done for girls under the rubric of gender reform is often 'grossly exaggerated' (p.59). Second, their research shows that often boys have been included in school-based 'equal opportunity' reforms. Third, in terms of resources spent on girls and boys, they note that in their research schools a whole range of support programmes for students 'at risk' in effect work 'unofficially as boys' programs' (p.60), what they refer to as 'accidental gender imbalance' (p.61).

Programs for girls need to continue and, in fact, need to become more widespread.

Programs, with the context of gender equity for girls, still needed to be addressed are:

·   development and use of curriculum material (eg. to include positive examples of women);

·   teaching methods (boys are often still receiving the majority of the teachers attention and time);

·   girls' passivity and "invisibility" and the damage effects of such behaviour;

·   use of playground space (boys disproportionately occupy the space);

·   allocation and use of resources eg. computers, sporting and technological;

·   encouragement of girls in sport, particularly during adolescence and beyond;

·   girls' selection of subjects and post-school pathways (Australia remains the most sex-segregated workforce in the OECD);

·   girls' mental health (including anorexia and self-harm);

·   eliminating sex-based harassment in schools;

·   addressing lack of women in promotional positions in schools.

Mental Health Indicators

The figures for male youth suicide are very concerning but the way they are reported often disguises the fact that the situation for young women is actually more severe than the situation for young men.

The 1997 Australian Bureau of Statistics Mental Health and Wellbeing profile (ABS 4326.0) found that the rate of mental illness in the young adult group (18 - 24) was the highest for any age group and that the rate was highest among young women. Young women are three times more likely to exhibit disorders such as depression and stress, whilst young men are twice as likely to have substance abuse related disorders.

Another ABS study; **Suicide in Australia 1921 - 1998** (ABS 33090 March 2000) has demonstrated that the patterns of Australian suicide are quite different from those often presented in the media and misused in this debate. Since reliable record keeping commenced in 1921, male deaths have accounted for roughly 3:4 suicides. This is a tragic and alarming statistic, which justifiably should obligate us to explore explanations and responses. It is not, however, a recent phenomena, and since 1994, the male to female suicide ratio has been in decline, with females now representing an increasing proportion of total suicides. Equally, this study demonstrates that the male suicide rate has always been higher in the 25-44 age group that the 15-24 cohort and that until 1988, the 65+ male suicide rate was also higher than the youth rate. It also indicates that rurality/isolation is not a significant coefficient in suicide statistics. (17 per 100,000 compared to 15 for urban areas).

Girls are often reported as quiet and passive in class. Their mental health indicators are often focussed on self-harm, anorexia or depression. Girls who have problems are often not as obvious as boys with problems, who are angry or not coping. There is often an invisibility about girls' mental health since it does not force itself on the school's operations in the same way that dominant masculinity in its dysfunctional state does.

Initiatives needed for boys

As outlined elsewhere in this Submission, it is not clear that the situation for boys at school has worsened over recent times. Research does not seem to bear out such a claim. What is new is the greater public scrutiny and parental anxiety about the situation (Yates 2000).

However any analysis of boys activities at school shows that narrow, stereotyped definitions of masculinity continue to disadvantage many boys and the behaviours exhibited have a damaging effect on many girls. Many negative aspects of boys' behaviours cause problems for other students, teachers and school communities.

Changes in attitudes/behaviour of boys and men is also fundamental to addressing the educational disadvantage experienced by girls.

What is needed in schools is an understanding of the construction of gender and consequent range of ways to define masculinity in the modern Australian society.

Schools need to counter the dominant culture of masculinity that can include aggressive and dangerous behaviour, an anti-academic success attitude, a focus on a narrow range of curriculum options (traditional "male" subjects) and poor emotional and inter and intra personal skills. Young men need to feel safe and supported in schools to develop alternative ways of being male. (Lingard and Douglas 1999).

Boys need to be encouraged to examine their damaging behaviour and take responsibility for changing it themselves.

Care needs to be taken not to reproduce the worst aspects of dominant masculinity through initiatives for boys' education or to depict boys as the new victims of girls' educational initiatives. Rather, an opportunity exists for improved educational outcomes for boys and girls.

The focus of any gender equity initiatives also needs to be strongly influenced by issues of socio-economic status ie. "which boys" needs to be asked.

Within this Gender Equity Framework, which recognises the needs of girls and boys and which seeks positive outcomes for all, the following strategies are recommended:

· a study of the social construction of gender;
· information about a range of definitions of masculinity and "ways to be a man" in contemporary Australia;
· a valuing of the emotional and social development of boys in addition to their intellectual development;

· an understanding that traditional stereotypes limit life options;
· the predominantly male issue of bullying and harassment in schools. An understanding of the harm boys and men inflict on themselves and on women and girls;
· a focus on developing constructive conflict resolution and negotiation skills;
· parenting and domestic skills;
· the effect of job choice on the rest of boys'/men's lives and responsibilities. The effect of not considering family, friendship and community aspects preparing for a career.

Once again, the Committee is referred to the Strategic Directions and Strategies contained in *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*.

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APPENDICES

[Not reproduced]

Appendix 1   **AEU Policy on Gender Equity 1996**

Appendix 1a   **AEU Draft 2000 Gender Equity Policy and Action Plan**

Appendix 2   **Gender Equity Resources in NSW Primary Schools**

Appendix 3   **Five Strategic Directions with Outcomes and Indicators of Improvement from**
Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools

Appendix 4   **AEU Policy on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Education 1995**

Appendix 5   **AEU Policy on Education in Rural Areas 1989**

Appendix 6   **AEU Policy on Youth "Standing with the Young" 2000**

Appendix 7   **AEU Policy on   Sexual Orientation and Gender Preferred Identity 1995**

Appendix 8   **AEU Policy on Curriculum 1993**