



**INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION of Australia**

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12 December, 2000

Mr James Rees  
Secretary – Inquiry into the Education of Boys  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
On Employment, Education and Workplace Relations  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Rees,

**Re : Additional Comments Further to IEUA Submission and Input to  
Committee Hearing in Sydney on November 14.**

Thank you for the opportunity for NSW/ACT IEU Officers Glynis Jones and Pam Smith to speak to the union's submission at the hearings in Sydney on November 14 and for the transcript subsequently provided for checking. The union also provided at the hearing copies of relevant articles from its publications Independent Education and Bedrock and other materials in regard to gender issues.

While no specific changes to the transcript are proposed, further to the IEUA's input on November 14 and in response to some specific matters raised on that occasion, the IEUA would like to provide the following additional comments:

1.0 Aggregation / Disaggregation Issues in Relation to Boys' Educational Needs and Services

As was indicated at the hearing, the IEUA representatives were perplexed by the line of questioning in regard to the aggregation / disaggregation issue (pp 455-456 and 464-465 of transcript). The union believes that this is a false dichotomy, as there are clearly situations when all or most boys may benefit from programs, for example, to address violence, bullying or homophobia, and other situations where specific groups of boys, such as young indigenous males, boys in rural areas where youth suicide is a concern, or urban NESB boys with literacy difficulties, may require targeted intervention.

To treat all boys as having the same or even similar needs is both poor pedagogy and wasteful of scarce education resources. Central to an effective boys' education strategy must be discernment of the needs of boys as individuals and at school and community levels. Similar principles should also underpin programs to support girls, with a focus on achieving more socially just and educationally equitable outcomes for all students. Such outcomes will require different levels and forms of intervention for different students.

## 2.0 Nature and Nurture Arguments

The IEU was also somewhat surprised at this line of questioning (pp 458-459 of transcript), given the Inquiry's focus on ways in which Government initiatives and policy directions can influence boys' educational experiences and outcomes. While the factors affecting every child's development are complex, the IEUA's submission focuses upon those issues where schools and other social institutions can make a difference in countering the disadvantage and risk which many students face. As was noted in the "Non Completion of School in Australia" survey in section 6.5 of the IEUA submission, school organisation and structures and curriculum issues were cited by the researchers as being crucial in "nurturing" students through the vital early years of schooling into the middle years.

While the concept of social construction of gender emphasises the key role of schools in both shaping and re-defining boys' and girls' understandings of what it means to be male and female in today's society, this is not in conflict with acknowledging students' individual differences. As stated in 6.4 of the IEUA's submission, preferred learning styles, modes of expression and other characteristics are especially important in the early years of schooling when attitudes to learning are being developed.

While academics may continue to argue about biological determinism and the relative impacts of nature and nurture, in practice parents' and teachers know that caring and supportive family and school environments play a vital role in bringing out the best in each child. In educational terms, this means working with students individually and collectively in relation to curriculum programs and pastoral care.

## 3.0 Male and Female Role Models for Boys

The IEUA is concerned by some aspects of the boys' education debate which implies that part of boys' "problem" is that there are insufficient male role models for many boys at home or at school (pp 261-262 of transcript). In particular, the IEUA rejects that the performance of boys is being adversely affected by the "feminisation" of the teaching profession. The union's view is that teaching needs to become more attractive and appropriately remunerated for both men and women. More male teachers are needed but so are more females in leadership roles in schools and education systems.

As was mentioned at the hearing on November 14, the IEU is concerned about continuing imbalances in women's access to leadership positions in non-

government schools. A copy of a recent Independent Education article about this matter is enclosed for information.

The IEUA thanks the Parliamentary Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry and would be pleased to be part of what is hoped will be an ongoing dialogue in relation to boys' education and gender justice for all students in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Rolley  
Federal Secretary