



INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF AUSTRALIA

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The Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600 Australia
Email: eet.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Please find attached the IEUA's submission to the Inquiry into the Academic Standards of School Education.

The IEUA would appreciate appearing before the Committee and elaborating further on the submission we have made.

Many thanks for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Rolley
Federal Secretary

1. INTRODUCTION

The Independent Education Union of Australia is the federally registered union which represents teachers and support staff in non-government education institutions including early childhood centres, schools and post secondary training institutions, across all the states and territories of Australia.

The union currently has a membership of more than 63,000. In the school sector, the membership density is approximately 65% thus giving the union a legitimate and authoritative voice on professional and industrial issues on behalf of members in responding to the various educational inquiries and debates within the community.

The IEUA has a deep knowledge and understanding of the professional role and work of its members in teaching Australia's students. This includes professional issues such as curriculum, assessment, reporting, the organisation of teaching and learning, and the standards underpinning professional knowledge and practice to name but a few.

2. CURRENT CONTEXT OF THIS INQUIRY

The IEUA believes that more than ever before, education - and in particular curriculum and student performance – has been politicised. The Federal Government has given a tone to its statements of an educational crisis in the country because, it alleges, schools are failing in their task of educating students. This has happened over the decade of its incumbency and is most recently evident in the Prime Minister's preparedness to lend his Prime Ministerial authority to education commentator Kevin Donnelly by launching the latter's book *"Dumbing Down."* In doing so, the Prime Minister said the following :

"For too long, the education debate has focused exclusively on inputs and quality, on money spent on student-teacher ratios and the like. And this was the territory staked out and defended fiercely by education producer groups, by the state education bureaucracies, curriculum designers and the teacher unions. Our great challenge as a nation is to improve the quality of Australia's education system."

It is hard to fathom why anyone, nonetheless the Prime Minister, would think that a focus on inputs and quality should be the subject of derision. Certainly it is entirely appropriate that education bureaucracies, curriculum designers and teacher unions would give a lot of attention to these issues and would argue strenuously for their continued improvement. To say that it has been the exclusive focus of such groups is wrong.

A statement of similar tone and content came from Minister Bishop's address to the National Press Club in February 2007 (her speech, *Preparing Children to Succeed – Standards in our Schools*) when she said:

"Education is a national priority and it is too important to be left at the mercy of state parochialism and union self-interest ...Raising academic standards and improving educational outcomes for Australian students involves making some hard choices. It means making decisions that State Labor governments, education unions and other vested interests will not like."

While the stated targets might have been the State governments and the unions, teachers feel the full force of such criticism because they are the professionals in the classroom charged with, and committed to, the responsibility for delivering high quality teaching and learning.

Further weight is given to this increasing politicisation of education with the Commonwealth's use of the funding lever to force education authorities to agree to the policy detail and implementation of its national reform agenda, despite the fact that it employs no teacher in the country (as Treasurer Costello responded recently to Minister Bishop in relation to funds for performance pay).

This changed approach to federal funding (from 2004) has given a new edge to the federal government's education policies. Such an approach is divisive and undermines the capacity for cooperative work with State and Territory governments and a number of key stakeholders, including the education unions which are major representative bodies of the teaching profession. This is counter-productive to strengthening Australia's education systems.

It is the IEUA's view that these political shifts are damaging for education in Australia. They are perceived by the profession and the education community (and more broadly) as the government expressing a lack of confidence in our schools. The IEUA urges the Committee to this Inquiry to consider the impact of such negativity and the often gratuitous comments on those engaged in educating our students.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for the Inquiry are broad. The information document provided for the Inquiry notes: ***“the purpose of this inquiry is to inform the Senate about perceptions and realities of standards and achievement levels in schools at a time when there is doubt in some quarters as to whether schools are preparing students adequately for the immediate workforce and for higher education.”***

The issues of standards and achievement levels of students (whether perceived or real) have long been cause for comment, contest and doubt. The IEUA believes that any analysis of the questions posed in the terms of reference cannot be divorced from the issues of education resourcing and teacher quality and development.

The goal of continuous school improvement will always require the need to challenge whether we are doing as well as can and will involve ongoing review and reflection to inform improvement in pedagogy, practice and policy. This happens in Australia. The way that it happens is important. It needs to:

- be well resourced by Federal and State/Territory governments
- be the subject of long-term workforce planning by Federal and State/Territory governments
- be grounded in an enabling approach to student learning – that is, a developmental model rather than a deficit one. (Hort 2003)

- recognise the expertise of the teaching profession and to deeply engage and involve the profession and other education stakeholders in the process.
- be based on sound research in terms of quality teaching and learning and student performance
- invest in the ongoing professional learning for the teaching profession

These are the issues which the IEUA will examine in responding to the terms of reference for this Inquiry.

4. THE VALUE OF SUCH AN INQUIRY

The IEUA supports this Inquiry's intention to gain a deeper understanding of how well Australia's education system is serving both its students and the community - and that it is seeking to do this in a way that it is based on sound research, considered opinion, analysis and expertise. Such an approach will stand in contrast to the climate of criticism and crisis which has been generated in the public domain, in the main by politicians and the media.

Reports from international surveys indicate that Australia's education performance competes favourably with other advanced OECD nations. However, there are students whose experience at school is not positive and who leave school not having met the standards which would take them forward to further formal education or to the world of work.

This is not acceptable for those students and their families or for the wellbeing of the nation as a whole. Neither does it meet the National Goals of Schooling, the foundation charter of Australian school education, which states:

“Schooling should be socially just, so that all students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.....”

and also:

“that students’ outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of ...differences arising from students’ socio-economic background”

Within and across schools and sectors, there is evidence that the school experience does not produce equitable and acceptable outcomes for a range of students. For example, clearly we are failing Indigenous students in their education. There are also many students in remote, rural and regional Australia whose education experience is a very different one to students in the major cities. Within cities, there is evidence that a student's postcode (often reflective of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage in Australia) is an indicator of school success or not. A range of other variables can affect whether or not a student at a particular stage of schooling has been adequately prepared. All of us have our anecdotes about teachers, schools and events which have left their mark, both positive and negative in terms of education outcomes.

It is in the national and public interest that educational inequity and inequality are redressed through ongoing research and targeted policy strategies to ensure equitable

educational opportunities and outcomes for all students regardless of where they live or their background.

5. PREVIOUS INQUIRIES

There have been many parliamentary Inquiries held over the last twenty years which go to the heart of the issues pertinent to this Inquiry. The Australian government has also commissioned research work into quality teaching and learning, quality and equity in schooling and the effectiveness of schooling in accord with the National Goals of Schooling. These have produced scholarly reports based on quality research, guided by Committees broadly representative of the education community. Other similar national Inquiries and consultations have been held by bodies such as HREOC and MCEETYA.

The body of work from this Australian research and their recommendations should also guide the deliberations of this Inquiry.

The IEUA notes the following as examples of substantial work from previous Inquiries which would be relevant to this Inquiry:

- *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1994*
- *Senate Inquiry into Early Childhood Education 1996*
- *Senate Inquiry into The Status of Teachers 1997*
- *HREOC Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education 1999*
- *Learning Lessons – An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory 1999*
- *House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into the Education of Boys 2000*
- *Senate Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools 2002*
- *Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities 2002*
- *Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, Young People, Schools and Innovation 2003*
- *Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Training and Employment Outcomes 1999*
- *MCEETYA and DEST commissioned research on Education Workforce Planning from the mid 1990s to the present.*
- *House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education 2005*
- *National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy 2005*

RECOMMENDATION: The IEUA believes that the Committee should undertake a comprehensive audit of the reports and recommendations from parliamentary Inquiries and commissioned research over the last decade which have terms of reference relevant to this Inquiry.

Such an audit would give insight into whether well-founded recommendations by serious researchers have been implemented and whether they have made a difference to teaching and learning outcomes. This would be a valuable service to

the education and broader community and would provide a thoughtful and cautionary foundation for any recommendations the Committee might make.

6. TERM OF REFERENCE 1

Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:

- (a) the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and**
- (b) the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community**

6.1 The Classroom – the Locus of Good Teaching and Learning

Curriculum - The Heart of Quality Teaching and Learning

The IEUA has long supported educational reform in curriculum that is based upon research, that ensures educational validity and integrity and very importantly that supports teacher professional judgement. Curriculum is not a values-free endeavour – it has always been an area of strong contestation and is so at the present time.

There are multiple definitions of curriculum. Kelly has defined it as “the totality of the experiences which a pupil has as a result of the provision made” (Kelly, A.V 1999). What is in and out of the curriculum and its underpinning philosophy are critical questions for the profession and for society. It covers planning, content, assessment and reporting and the related administrative procedures of the formal curriculum; co-curricular activities; judgements about teaching approaches; the interaction of teachers and students; what is taught, how and to whom; and what is learned, not only as a result of formal teaching but as a result of the way things are planned and organised in a school.

The curriculum should be intellectually rigorous and should also promote creativity and collaboration and provide a sense of learning progression as well as guidance of programs for students according to their potential and needs rather than by age. There should be a clear focus on the student irrespective of their stage of learning. Curriculum should provide students with the knowledge and skills to enable them to manage their future needs.

The curriculum must provide teachers with the confidence to tackle critical social issues such as discrimination, whatever its form. International evidence shows that equal opportunity policies raise standards but cannot work as effectively as they might if the curriculum constrains rather than encourages acceptance of diversity of lifestyles, values and beliefs.

While maintaining the emphasis on literacy and numeracy, there are also new ways of learning with a greater focus on enquiry, collaborative and team approaches to learning, and problem-based learning. These impact on classroom organisation, contextual links

and delivery strategies, presenting new challenges for teacher professional knowledge and practice. There must be sufficient time for teachers to respond to students' individual needs and interests.

Developing lifelong learners through local and globalised contexts that reflect the knowledge society, the information economy and realisation of individual potential is essential. Knowledge and how it is organised is not fixed and it is therefore important that curriculum development takes account of this and that students understand the interconnection of different bodies of knowledge.

From the early 1990s, micro economic and workplace reform has emphasised concepts of lifelong learning and effective communication, working in teams rather than on mass production lines, progression to higher level skills through recognised and accredited vocational training and implementation of workforce consultative mechanisms in the workplace. The message is that for an organisation to be competitive in the modern economy, it has to be a continuous learning organisation, with more highly skilled and better-paid workers. Business has been more interventionist in the education debate and has pressed governments about the need for schools to better meet the demands of globalisation and the highly competitive international economy. This drive for more highly skilled workers in the context of workplace reform and international globalisation continues.

The IEUA notes both the time and expertise that teachers have committed over the years to developing curriculum and learning opportunities for students. Indeed, curriculum development that has occurred over recent years in the states and territories has involved all stakeholders including teachers, parents, employers and experts from the university sector.

The IEUA rejects the tone of a 'back to basics' mantra in the current debate which represents a serious failure in educational leadership and is political opportunism at its best. Such a simplistic notion fails to address the critical knowledge, understanding and competencies that employers themselves have been asking schools to address for the last decade such as problem solving, entrepreneurship and team-work.

There is at present constructive and innovative work being advanced by representatives of the key national professional education organisations under the convenorship of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association. These organisations include the education unions, Principals' Associations, Australian Council of Deans, Australian College of Educators, Australian Association for Research in Education, National Educational Forum and Joint Council of Professional Teaching Associations.

The nature and purpose of the work advanced by these organisations (now formed into a Curriculum Standing Committee of National Education Professional Associations) is constructive and focused.

The framework underpinning its ongoing work is the document *A Guide to Productive National Curriculum Work for the 21st Century* and the IEUA recommends this Senate Inquiry to consider the work being advanced by the Standing Committee.

This deliberative work is strongly supported by the IEUA. It is based on sound research, intellectual rigour, professional respect and inclusiveness which are the values which should drive curriculum reform in Australia.

Assessing Student Achievement in the Classroom

The IEUA has expressed concern about public policy which emphasises mass standardised testing of student achievement such as through Standardised Achievement Tests (SAT). Such approaches to student assessment are very resource intensive; they take teachers away from delivering their curriculum programs; do not give a real measure of student knowledge, understandings and abilities; they can lead to teaching to the test; they narrow the curriculum and undermine teacher professionalism. The IEUA remains sceptical of the educational value of such practices for teachers, students and their parents because they lead to a lowering of the quality of education and the overall level of student achievement; and because of the dubious educational validity of the instruments of testing.

In its submission to the 2005 National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, the IEUA referred to a Federal Government initiative to collect national data on the levels of English attainment of Australian Students (*Mapping Literacy Achievement – Results of the 1996 National Schools English Literacy Survey Masters, G.N. & Forster, M (ACER) 1997*). The data collection took place through the National School English Literacy Survey.

The overall purpose of the Survey *“was to produce a consistent factual analysis of the existing situation to be used as a baseline data to monitor national performance over time and to inform strategies to improve literacy in Australian schools”*

The Report to the Minister indicates that the Survey methodology for the Survey *“produced the richest picture of the literacy achievements of school students to date in this country”* The key factors in the methodology were

- Well-funded teacher-led professional learning
- Integration of normal classroom activity and practice with the assessment process
- High quality assessment materials consistent with curriculum objectives and classroom activity
- Immediate and relevant feedback for the teacher
- Assessment methodology grounded on teacher input and professional knowledge

The IEUA believes that the development and implementation of assessment and reporting policies and practices must:

- Respect and involve the expertise and professional judgment of teachers and have their support and full confidence;
- Allocate appropriate timelines and resources for consultation and implementation of any changes in policy and practice, including consideration of workload implications.

The IEUA believes that the following principles should guide the development and use of assessment instruments:

- Assessment methods should be planned as an integral part of course developments
- Assessment processes must be reliable, fair and equitable
- Assessment should be based on an understanding of how students learn
- Assessment should be aligned with the curriculum
- Assessment should ensure that tasks are realistic, meaningful and worthwhile.
- Assessment practices should involve a range of measures and provide students with opportunities to display their knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes.

The teaching profession and their unions strongly support professional accountability – a critical link between quality teaching and student achievement. Accountability is a means by which quality information is made available to parents and teachers on student achievement but there are a number of other purposes including:

- Informing teachers, parents and students about the learning progress of individual and groups of students;
- Informing school and system authorities
- Providing information about the effectiveness of curriculum programs
- Determining resource requirements

The concern which the profession has with the federal government's approach to assessment and accountability is that it continues to put too great an emphasis on a narrow accountability approach through external standardised testing. The myth being created is that schools and teachers are failing to meet parents' and society's needs and expectations.

The IEUA has drawn together a framework, the sound principles of which should inform the development of public policy on a broad approach to educational accountability. This framework is attached. (Attachment A)

6.2 National and International Surveys

National Benchmark Testing

In 1997, MCEETYA determined to conduct national benchmark testing in Reading, Writing and Numeracy at years 3, 5, 7 (and more recently for year 9). This benchmark testing has taken place since 1999 and benchmark data has been published for each year from 1999 to 2005 in the National Report on Schooling in Australia.

The benchmarking process is intended to support the National Goal *“that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.”* The development and implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan underpins this policy goal, essential features of which include:

- early assessment and intervention for students at risk of not achieving minimum required standards

- development of national benchmarks for each of years 3, 5 and 7 and the assessment of student progress against these benchmarks
- national reporting of the benchmark data, and
- professional development for teachers

(from *The 2005 National Report on Schooling in Australia – Preliminary Paper provides the national benchmark results for reading, writing and numeracy for years 3, 5 and 7*)

These tests seek to “test the minimum standards of performance below which students will have difficulty progressing satisfactorily at school” (p2 of the 2005 National Report on Schooling in Australia) and require increasing levels of proficiency from year 3 through to years 5 and 7.

The benchmark reporting builds an incremental picture of student achievement over time. The inclusion in the purposes of teacher professional development and a commitment to interventionist support for students at risk is important.

A snapshot of some of the 2005 results for years 3, 5 and 7 show that:

- It matters where you live – the proportion of students achieving the benchmarks in very remote locations are much lower than those in metropolitan, provincial and remote students. And in descending order, the proportions of students achieving the benchmarks in provincial locations and remote locations are smaller than those in metropolitan locations.
- Being Indigenous matters - the proportion of indigenous students achieving the benchmarks are well below the proportion of non Indigenous students.
- Gender matters in relation to reading and writing – the proportion of female students achieving at the benchmark or above is higher than for male students in years 3, 5 and 7.
- Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) did not matter – the proportion of LBOTE students achieving the benchmarks were consistent with non LBOTE students.
- For each of years 3, 5 and 7 there is a group of students who do not meet the benchmarks in each of reading, writing and numeracy and over time, the size of the group increases. For example, in 2005, between 6% and 7% of year 3 students did not meet the benchmarks. In year 5, between 6.5% and 12.5% of students did not meet the benchmarks; and in year 7, between 7.8% and 18.2% of students did not meet the benchmarks.

These are significant findings. Issues of equity and resourcing are particularly relevant to a number of the findings listed above. What is important is whether targeted action on these matters for the particular cohorts of students has taken place ie was there early assessment and intervention for students at risk? And did that intervention make a noticeable difference the next time around?

International Surveys (TIMSS & PISA)

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

Australia has participated in the 4 TIMSS surveys since 1994/5. TIMSS is a large international study designed to measure trends in students' knowledge and abilities in maths and science at both years 4 and year 8 levels. It essentially has a curriculum focus (tests knowledge and understanding of mathematics and science facts and concepts) but also investigates the cultural environments, teaching practices, curriculum goals and institutional arrangements that are associated with achievement.

The ACER in "Highlights from TIMSS from Australia's Perspective 2002/03" provides an overview of student achievement in science and mathematics overall and in various content domains; Australia's performance at the international benchmarks; and information on the Australian TIMSS students.

In relation to years 4 and 8 science and mathematics achievement, ACER reports the following:

Science

In relation to year 4 science, ACER reports the following (p6):

Singapore scored significantly higher than any other country in Year 4 science

Australia's score in Year 4 science was significantly higher than the international average

Australia's performance in science in Year 4 has remained the same since TIMSS 1994/95, however the performance of other countries has improved so that of the countries that participated in TIMSS 1994/95 and TIMSS 2002/03, half now have an average score that is significantly higher than that of Australia, compared to only one in TIMSS 1994/95.

There was no gender difference in Year 4 science in Australia. Internationally, there were significant differences in about one-third of the countries, evenly split between advantage for females and advantage for males.

In relation to year 8 science, ACER reports the following (p7):

Singapore and Chinese Taipei significantly outscored all other countries

Australia's score was significantly higher than the international average

Australia's performance was not significantly different to that of a number of countries including the Netherlands, the United States and New Zealand.

Australia's score in year 8 significantly increased between TIMSS 1994/95 and TIMSS 2002/03. As a result the performance of some countries that were statistically similar to Australia is now significantly lower than that for Australia.

There were significant gender differences in achievement in science in many countries and almost all were in favour of males. Australia was one of these countries with males outscoring females on average by 20 score points.

Maths

Year 4	Year 8
<p>In relation to year 4 mathematics, ACER reports the following: (p4):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Singapore and Hong Kong SAR significantly outscored all other countries</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">There was a large group of countries which significantly outscored Australia in mathematics at Year 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Australia's average score at Year 4 in mathematics was not different to the average internationally. In TIMSS 1994/95 the Year 4 average for Australia was significantly higher than the international average.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Australia's performance has remained the same since TIMSS 1994/95, however the performance of other countries has improved so that Australia's score is relatively lower.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">There was no significant gender difference in overall mathematics achievement at year 4 in Australia</p>	<p>In relation to year 8 mathematics, ACER reports the following:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Singapore scored significantly higher than all other countries</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Australia scored significantly higher than the international average</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Achievement in the USA, England, Scotland, New Zealand and Malaysia was similar to that of Australian students.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Australia's performance in mathematics in year 8 has remained the same since TIMSS 1994/95, however the performance of other countries has improved so that half of the countries outscored by Australia in TIMSS 1994/95 performed at a similar level to Australia in TIMSS 2002/03.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">There was no significant gender difference in mathematics achievement at year 8 in Australia. Internationally, there were some substantial differences in favour of males and some in favour of females.</p>

Other important findings related to attitudinal and contextual issues, include the following: (at p. 15)

- Home education resources – at both years 4 and 8, there was a clear and positive relationship between books in the home and achievement in both mathematics and science.
 - Gender – there was no significant gender difference in overall mathematics achievement at either year level. Year 4 females outperformed males in geometry; year 8 males significantly outperformed females in number and measurement
- In relation to science, there was no significant gender difference in overall science achievement in year 4. However, in year 8, males scored a significant 20 scale points higher than females, particularly in chemistry, physics, earth science and environmental science.
- Parental education – for year 8 students in both mathematics and science, achievement was higher for students whose parents had completed a university degree.

- Students' attitudes and beliefs – Australian students had relatively high self-confidence in learning mathematics, with males having higher self confidence than females. There was a clear positive correlation between positive self confidence and high achievement.

In relation to science, Australian students had a relatively high self-confidence in learning science although by year 8 self confidence in learning science for males was higher than females.

OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)

PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), conducted its first survey in 2000 and the second in 2003 with 41 countries taking part (27 of them OECD). Unlike TIMSS, PISA assesses the abilities of 15 year-olds to apply knowledge and skills to real-life problems and situations rather than how well they have learned a specific curriculum (as with TIMSS).

The focus for the 2000 PISA was reading literacy and for the 2003 assessment it was mathematics. However, both include elements of reading, science and mathematics literacies. A third assessment with its focus on science literacy took place in 2006. Results are not yet available.

A summary of Australia's achievement results from PISA 2000 in "How Literate Are Australian Students?" (Lokan, J., Greenwood, L., Cresswell, J. 2001) says the following:

The Australian students acquitted themselves very well in all the assessment domains. Their results were significantly above the OECD average in all areas...taking statistical significance into account, only Finland performed better than Australia in reading literacy, only Japan did likewise in mathematical literacy and only Korea and Japan outperformed Australia in scientific literacy. Considering only the highest-performing five percent of students in each country, Australia's record was even better, in that no country performed at a statistically significant higher level."

The 2003 PISA survey assessed students' capacity to apply knowledge and skills in mathematics, reading and scientific literacy as well as problem solving, with more assessment time given to mathematics. The Executive Summary from "Facing The Future – A Focus on Mathematical Literacy Among 15-year-old Students in PISA 2003" says the following:

- *Australia's results were above the OECD average in each of mathematical, scientific and reading literacy, as well as in problem solving and in each of the mathematical literacy subscales.*
- *Only one country achieved significantly better results than Australia in 'reading literacy' and this was Finland. Three countries achieved better results than Australia in scientific literacy, Finland, Japan and Korea. Four countries performed significantly better than Australia in problem solving, Korea, Hong Kong-China;*

Finland and Japan. Four countries performed significantly better than Australia in problem solving, Korea, Hong Kong-China, Finland and Japan.

- The Australian results also noted that a “*smaller gap in performance between the highest and lowest-achieving students*” than the average for the OECD.
- The results also showed “*an enduring concern in Australian education is the performance of Indigenous students relative to the performance of non-Indigenous students. ...on average, the Indigenous students’ performance was more than one proficiency level below the performance of non-Indigenous students in each domain in Australia*” (p205)

These reports also examined a range of other factors with the following representing a selection of indices from the 2000 and 2003 reports:

- gender differences: in both 2000 and 2003, the point is made that “*almost twice as many Australian males as females achieved the highest PISA proficiency level for mathematical literacy...and “the gender difference in favour of females in reading literacy was large, about 0.4 of a standard deviation (40 points) and this was larger than the OECD average*”.
- home language is English: where the home language was not English, students *performed at an equivalent level in mathematical literacy to students whose home language was English, but at a slightly lower level in reading literacy and a lower level in scientific literacy.*
- location of school (urban, provincial or remote): *students in more remote areas performed less well than their urban and provincial counterparts in reading and scientific literacy.*
- comfort and ability with computers: *Australian students registered one of the highest average scores on this index*
- self-regulated learning and homework indices: *Australia’s results were close to the OECD average*
- school attitudes: *Australian students were more positive than for the OECD average. Australian females had significantly more positive attitudes towards school than males.*
- student-teacher relationships: *Australian students reported more favourable student-teacher relationships than the OECD average.*
- teacher support index: *one of the highest recorded, well above the OECD average*
- impact of SES: *Australian students in the lowest quarter of SES were twice as likely as students not in that quarter to achieve low scores in reading...with males more likely than females to achieve low reading scores (and with females more likely to obtain a low score for mathematical literacy).*

6.3 Key Findings from National and International Testing

Educational Inequity and Inequality

The report on PISA 2000 notes that *“while the highest-performing Australian students achieved on a par with the highest achievers anywhere, the analysis ...shows that Australia has a long way to go compared with some other countries in compensating for socioeconomic disadvantage. The OECD considers that the most successful countries are those whose students achieve at a high level regardless of their socioeconomic background.*

The PISA 2003 report reiterates this: *“While the relationship between socioeconomic background and performance in mathematical literacy was less strong than for the OECD on average, there still exists a distinct advantage for those students with higher socioeconomic backgrounds. While schools are not able to influence students’ backgrounds, they are able to introduce policies that help to counteract the effects of disadvantage. Although many schools already do this there is work to be done because the differences observed are greater than would be considered desirable in relation to our national aspirations.”* (PISA in Brief From Australia’s Perspective p15)

The ABS Year Book Australia 2006 reported similarly but importantly also noted that *“while Australian students attained a good overall result in 2003, achievement varied across students with different characteristics associated with social and demographic factors such as socioeconomic status, family background, school setting and teacher characteristics”.*

It goes on to state *“that students attending schools in rural and remote areas experience educational disadvantage in a variety of ways. Major issues contributing to this are the recruitment and retention of teachers and barriers to accessing educational services. The results for Indigenous students were consistently lower than for non Indigenous students.”*

“Furthermore, with respect to per capita spending, the reports show Australia is ranked 18th out of 30 OECD countries for government education expenditure as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product.” (<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs>)

Argy (2007 *Educational Inequalities in Australia*) argues that governments should be concerned about education inequalities because longitudinal studies across the world indicate that education success rates at school and post-school are in good part determined by social class origin – in particular parents’ wealth, occupational status, education and aspirations. Education inequality then flows to employment inequality.

‘Where we lag behind most other developed countries is not in average standards but in levels of education access by the more disadvantaged. The differences in academic performance between our highest and lowest performing students (and even between the lowest and median) are large in Australia and more dependent on the influence of class, family and social background than in many other countries such as Canada,

Ireland, Austria, Korea, Finland and other Scandinavian countries. The OECD puts us in the “high quality/low equity box in its international comparisons of reading literacy”.

Argy notes that governments in Australia spend less on education and active labour market programs such as training than a majority of developed OECD countries and what is spent on education flows proportionately more to the more advantaged students.

This is confirmed by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum’s report *How Young People are Faring – Key Indicators 2005*” which states the following:

“How Young People are Faring 2005 suggests that as a nation we are only just holding our own against our international competitors. On the domestic front, it tells a story of insiders and outsiders. Many young people today are better educated and better skilled than previous generations, but the half million 15-24 year olds who are at best marginally attached to learning or work, face enduring disadvantage. And, not surprisingly perhaps, those young people growing up amidst stressed socio-economic circumstances are particularly susceptible.” (p vii)

A key finding of this report is that each year a substantial proportion of young Australians make a poor transition from school to further study and work. Around 15% of 15-19 year-olds are neither in full time work nor full time study. Three out of every 10 young Australians has a precarious or negligible attachment to work one year after leaving school. A quarter of Australians aged 18 to 19 are not in full-time education and work. The situation for 20-24 year-olds is similar. And these proportions have been almost unchanged for a decade or so.....The strange thing is that it occurs against a background of an economy that has been expanding for at least a decade.” (p. 46)

7. REDRESSING INEQUITY AND INEQUALITY

Resourcing School Education

The IEUA has long argued for a federal funding regime for schooling that is transparent and accountable. It is evident that since 1996 the Howard government’s education funding policies have exacerbated divisions in the Australian community.

The IEUA believes that not only are there genuine concerns and indeed demonstrable problems with the current federal funding arrangements but there is a need for a transparent and open review of the policy.

In particular, the IEUA notes:

- The current model of funding non-government schools is flawed– it ignores the actual capacity of individual schools to generate resources and provides substantial additional funds to the most highly-resourced schools in the country. These schools operate well above the general resource levels of most government, Catholic and other community schools.
- There is no principled basis in the current funding scheme for Catholic systemic schools which make up about 65% of all non-government schools.

- There is an absence of policy cohesion between federal and state/territory governments in relation to the principles of funding schools.
- The federal government is using the threat of withdrawing funding around a number of education agendas including the requirement to report in 'league tables' format, despite clear evidence overseas of the inappropriateness of this approach.

In 2002, the MCEETYA Resourcing Taskforce was established to determine whether the reported expenditure reflected in the Average Government School Resources Costs (AGSRC) accurately represented the underlying costs of schooling. MCEETYA's intention was to establish the concept of a national resourcing standard for government schools.

In 2004, the Taskforce reported on its work in relation to the question ***“what does a school need in terms of costed human and physical resources to function effectively?”*** The results were telling. At 2003 prices, the Taskforce primary national standard was \$8265 and the secondary standard was \$11,186. These figures did not include capital costs, students with disabilities, servicing of capital or payroll tax.

According to the MCEETYA Taskforce, these figures represent the level of recurrent funding needed to meet the costs of primary and secondary schooling. However, the actual recurrent funding paid in 2003 was \$6056 per primary student and \$8021 per secondary student. This represents an underfunding of \$2209 per primary student and \$3165 per secondary student.

What is the scenario for 2007? If the known annual supplementation rates for the years 2004-2006 were added to the MCEETYA Taskforce figures, it would give a primary standard of \$9837 and a secondary standard of \$12974 . The amounts actually being received in 2007 are \$7216 for primary and \$9319 for secondary. This is an underfunding of \$2621 and \$3655 respectively.

The IEUA believes that a more coherent public policy on education funding is essential. It must acknowledge the realities of Australian schools and provide the way forward for a more equitable, less divisive framework of funding schooling.

Such a policy should include:

- A national resources standard for schools, to provide for the educational needs of every Australian student.
- Public resourcing of government schools to the actual benchmark needed to provide quality education for every student.
- Non-government schools to be publicly accountable on the same basis as government schools and be funded by government on the basis of genuine need, with reference to the national resources standard.
- Modification of the current SES funding model to include a proper measure of the actual resources of all non-government schools, and funding directed accordingly.
- Development of clear principles to bring the differential funding from state and federal sources into a consistent framework. This would enable public discussion of

funding realities to take account of all sources of funding for government and non-government schools.

- The requirement that equity measures target extra funding across all schools where relevant student and/or school needs are identified.

The responsibility for quality must be a collective one across governments, education systems, the teaching profession and the community. There should be an emphasis on collaboration not competition between schools or sectors. Nor should funding be used as a blunt instrument to ensure compliance with government policy.

8. THE MAJOR GAPS IN EDUCATION PROVISION

Early Childhood Education

Argy points out that “the seeds of education and employment disadvantage are sown early in life. Early childhood education and care has been a long-standing area of neglect in Australia. Participation in preschool programs in Australia is very low compared with other OECD nations and so too is total public expenditure for pre-school education and care. This is reflected in wide inequalities of access to pre-schooling. Better access to early childhood education for children of disadvantaged backgrounds, especially between the ages of 2 and 4 would give these children a better start in life.”

In 2006 the OECD released a report **Starting Strong II** into the early childhood policies, and government spending on the early years, from 20 countries.

The report highlighted the very low levels of investment in quality early childhood services in Australia, noting that **we spend less than any other first-world country** on preschool, and our kindergarten teachers are the worst paid and least trained.

The report shows that more countries are making early childhood education and care a priority, with greater attention paid to service quality. Increasingly, it shows the early years are viewed as the first step in lifelong learning and a key to successful social, family and education policies.

The evidence confirms what matters in early childhood services if they are to support children’s learning and development. The current regulations and standards are insufficient to support quality outcomes for children. What is needed is greater investment and real cooperation between state/territory and national governments to provide these funds in a way which really leverages increased service quality.

Starting Strong II provides a comparative analysis of policy developments and issues, highlighting innovative approaches and proposing policy options that can be adapted to different national contexts. Among other things, it notes:

- a growing consensus – based on research from a wide range of countries covering demographics, social change and cost-benefit analyses – that governments must invest in and regulate early childhood education and care;

- a trend towards integrating early childhood policy and administration under one ministry, often education;
- moves towards greater contact between early childhood centres and schools, and growing use of national curricular frameworks in the early childhood sector;
- the provision of at least two years of kindergarten before children enter compulsory schooling;
- growing but still insufficient government investment in services;
- more participatory approaches to quality improvement, based on wide consultation of stakeholders and the engagement of professional staff in documentation and research;
- clearer ideas at government level of the qualifications needed by staff to engage with rapidly changing social and family conditions;
- an increase in university chairs in early childhood education and care policy;
- and a recognition of the need for more country research and data collection in the field.

Is this new information? Anything but. There is long-standing national and international research emphasising the importance of early childhood education.

More than 10 years ago, in its submission to the 1996 Senate Inquiry into Early Childhood Education, the IEUA elaborated on the work of the OECD Education Committee which had released a communique *Innovation in Education (1991)*. The communique emphasised the need to develop national education and training policies which would provide society with the capacity to cope with the social, community, technological and environmental changes into the 21st century.

The OECD communique stated that *initial education and training play a crucial role in lifelong learning*. It emphasised that *learning is pivotal to contemporary progress and that initial education and training systems need to be of such universally high quality that all young people secure the foundation of knowledge, skills, understanding and values to enable their full participation in meeting these different challenges*. The communique acknowledged that *effective schooling cannot be developed in isolation, that early childhood education is important for subsequent success and schooling should build on the influential pre-school years*.

The IEUA submission supported these recommendations and urged the 1996 Senate Inquiry to consider these when making its report and recommendations.

Research within Australia which predated this OECD communique made similar recommendations. The 1989 report of the *Committee of Review of the New South Wales Schools* under the chair of Sir John Carrick, stressed the importance of the early pre-school years in the process of learning. The report states that:

“Its (early childhood education) quality has a profound effect upon the intellectual, social and emotional development of the child. Provision of quality early childhood education, available to all, is fundamental to the principle of educational opportunity.” (p83)

The Carrick report details that within quality early childhood environments, children develop self-confidence, social skills, problem solving and creative skills. Their language concepts and vocabulary, mathematical and spatial concepts and physical skills are enhanced. Good quality early childcare and education sets the right foundation for children’s further development.

There is a consistency in the substance of the 2006 OECD [Starting Strong II](#) report and that of the 1989 Carrick Report. In the intervening years, there have been numerous similar reports from national and international research confirming that quality early education leads to a rise in the achievement levels of children throughout their schooling and to engage with the world of work more successfully. There has been no follow-up from Australian governments to put into place policies which give reality to the recommendations from these important research reports and recommendations. This represents significant failure in the national interest.

RECOMMENDATION:

There is an urgent need for governments across all Australian jurisdictions to redress the shortcomings in the early years of education and to significantly lift investment in early childhood education and care in line with the national and international research reports which emphasise the importance of early childhood education.

Primary Education

The 2004 Study into the Resourcing of Australian Primary Schools (Angus, M; Olney, H; Ainley, J; Caldwell, B; Burke, G; Selleck, R; Spinks, J.) is the result of an investigation into **whether Australian primary schools have sufficient resources to achieve the goals set for them by Commonwealth and State Ministers for Education in the statement, *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*.**

Importantly, the report notes that not all primary students are able to achieve the National Goals:

The statement of National Goalsrepresents an ideal yet to be attained by many primary school students. Without additional financial and other resources, these (National) goals are outside the reach of many schools, particularly those with lower SES intakes unable to attract high-quality community support, adequate private contributions from parents and high-quality staff. (p.vi) ...and

While the vast majority of students achieve the levels expected, concentrations of failure are evident in disadvantaged groups, for example, Indigenous students. Thus a prima facie case can be made along these lines that schools need to do more if all students are to achieve the National Goals. (p.2)

This should be a matter of significance to this Senate Inquiry. It is clear from this report (and those related to early childhood education) that there are many young people whose early years of education – and also their further education, training and work – are jeopardised by inequitable and inefficient (as in not well-targeted) resourcing regimes

The report examines the question beyond just increasing financial resources. It also examines such issues as pedagogical and organisational changes in schools; consideration of, and mapping the resources already in schools; the background and needs of the children in schools; and in which schools are there concentrations of students who are failing to meet the National Goals. These include:

- The complexity in the methods used by school system authorities to fund schools – and the considerable differences which exist between sectors and within systems.
- How resource allocations made are not transparent and easily understood. It is therefore difficult to properly engage in the debate about school resourcing
- The issue of cost shifting from central authorities to schools
- Matching resources with the needs of students
- The significance of class size in the question of resource distribution
- The significance of the SES of class intakes
- The number of disabled and emotionally disturbed students enrolled and the level of resourcing for these students
- The organisation of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy across the Key Learning Areas.

Years on, many students from disadvantaged communities continue to struggle in school. Early childhood education remains underfunded and unavailable for many families in the community. There remain desperate problems for Indigenous education.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Inquiry examine the recommendations from this Study and others related to the resourcing of primary education which will ensure they have the capacity to meet the National Goals of Schooling.

9. THE VALUE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

To Inform Public Policy and Excellent Classroom Practice

Brian Doig from Deakin University's Faculty of Education believes the information from international and national surveys needs to be reworked into reports for the classroom which are timely, relevant and in a language both teachers and pupils can understand (media release 26/4/07)

Doig reviewed TIMSS and PISA, the Basic Skills Testing Program in NSW, the Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART) program from Victoria and national assessment from England and Wales.

He wanted to see if the information in these reports was able to be fed back into the classroom so it could improve parental understanding and teaching practice. *“An enormous amount of time and money goes into these programs and one of the justifications for this effort is that they provide parents and teachers with information that they can use.”*

In relation to TIMSS, Doig noted *“there is a double constraint. Both the students and curriculum are sampled, reducing the possibility of feedback with real impact. That said, my re-analysis showed that with a bit of tweaking, results of student assessments can be presented meaningfully.”*

He goes on to report that in Wales, the assessment data were reworked for classroom use and as a result assisted teachers in identifying issues in their classrooms. *“The Welsh Education office was prepared to pay for something that teachers could use. Until we are prepared to do the same, the millions of dollars spent on these assessment programs, by and large, is being wasted.”*

The IEUA supports Brian Doig’s contention that the fundamental importance of such national and international educational surveys is to inform quality teaching and learning in the classroom. If they do not do this, then they represent a significant investment of funds with little capacity to support quality teaching and learning.

“Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future – Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics” the main report from the Federal Government’s commissioned initiative, the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education (2003) has set out some key areas – highlighted by the outcomes from TIMSS and PISA - for the whole of schooling in which renewed efforts are needed to improve learning outcomes. (p192) These include the following:

- *Further extending the range of early childhood education facilities, developing collaborative national strategies and investing more in programs attuned to laying foundations from the beginning of schooling and in pre-school for scientific, mathematical and technological literacies;*
- *Focusing expertise, material resources, community effort and cross sectoral policies on the two groups most at risk of underperforming: Indigenous students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds – in addition, the reading competence of some boys requires special attention;*
- *In both initial education and professional development programs, and regardless of discipline, ensuring greater teacher understanding of constructivist learning and equipping teachers with the competencies to manage learning which is both student-centred and focused on definite outcomes;*
- *Providing more support and publicity to collaborative programs involving schools, universities and TAFE colleges and industry, to give students concentrated learning experiences in the uses and real-life application of science, technology and mathematics and other subjects;*
- *Strengthening and extending procedures for monitoring, evaluating and reporting learning outcomes.*

For Workforce Planning

It is the responsibility of governments across all jurisdictions to ensure there are sufficient numbers of highly trained teachers at all levels of schooling to teach all areas of the school curriculum – and that there is high quality provision of ongoing professional learning for teachers at various points in their career.

It is presently recognised that the issues of teacher supply and demand in Australia are critical.

The IEUA strongly believes that the issues of teacher recruitment, training and retention are directly connected with a number of others. These include, but are not limited to, the status of the profession; the speed and process of policy change and implementation; the loss of resources to education; the salary and conditions paid to teachers and issues related to the need for professional standards. In developing a comprehensive strategy to properly manage teacher supply and demand and teacher recruitment and retention, policy makers must address the overall contextual picture.

Workforce planning requires strategies to recruit, train, reward and retain world-class teachers across the curriculum from early childhood/primary to the senior secondary years. This is more urgent than ever, given the age cohort of the current teachers, with possibly half being close to 50 years. But it is an issue which has been the focus of public debate for almost a decade.

In 1998, the IEUA made a submission to the MCEETYA National Recruitment Strategy Taskforce inquiry and urged the development of long term strategies to address the issues of teacher supply and shortage without reducing the quality of educational outcomes for students.

Close to ten years later, the issues of teacher supply and demand in Australia remain critical.

In various forums, including Parliamentary Inquiries, the IEUA has proposed the following strategies:

- (a) Financial commitment to improve salaries and conditions
- (b) Increasing support for teachers (especially beginning teachers in difficult schools) and other mechanisms to improve teachers' effectiveness and professional satisfaction
- (c) Enhancing the status of teaching in the wider community, and the morale of teachers, through public and practical support for teachers and their work
- (d) Recruitment campaigns for initial teacher education programs and for teaching itself

In 2003, the Executive Summary from the report *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future – Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics* noted the following:

“Teachers are the key to mobilising schools for innovation. System-wide support and leadership both for and within schools is vital. The Review in emphasising these requirements gave attention to ways of improving the attractiveness of teaching, and career-long development....and

- *Ensuring an adequate supply of highly talented, well-educated teachers to meet the need for a more extensive provision of science, technology and mathematics in primary as well as secondary schooling;*
- *Understanding demand by region and specialisation and developing broader strategies to attract, recruit and retain quality teachers of all subjects and at all levels;*
- *Ensuring that all schools regardless of location are well staffed with appropriately qualified teachers; and*
- *Achieving a more diverse population of teachers, more representative of the cultural, social and ethnic diversity of the Australian community.*

It's perhaps worth pointing out that the barrage of criticism directed at schools and teachers about their failings by the print media, commentators and politicians is hardly experienced as positive by teachers – and nor will it attract candidates into the profession.

It is unacceptable that most teachers can report that during their career they have been required to teach some part of the curriculum for which they are not well qualified. Schools in regional and rural communities report they are unable to employ and retain staff in certain subject disciplines.

This gives rise to legitimate complaints from students and parents about the quality of teaching – but is grossly unfair to the teachers who have been required to take on classes by their school administration. Rather than scapegoating teachers and schools about falling standards, governments must take responsibility for implementing the recommendations from the Inquiries and commissioned reports regarding the essential priorities of Australian education.

What is equally disturbing is that quality research over significant time has been provided to governments about critical areas of the curriculum which need to be strengthened if Australia's economy and productivity are to have the benefit of highly educated communities.

For example, mathematics and science education in Australia have been the subject of considerable research and policy debate for many years. In 1995, the Australian Science, Technology and Engineering Council (ASTEC) published its study *“Matching Science and Technology to Future Needs: 2010”* emphasising the need to increase the level of both scientific and technological literacy in Australian society for the 21st century.

Arising from this initial work, ASTEC submitted a report to the Minister for Science and Technology *“Foundations for Australia’s Future – Science and Technology in Primary Schools”*. The work undertaken was based on the stated premise that *“the teaching of science and technology while in primary school is the most important means by which today’s children will begin to understand the importance and application science and technology in their lives”*. The findings and summary of recommendations from this 1995 research are set out below:

Main Findings

- much has been achieved in primary science and technology education over the past ten years but more needs to be done
- there is a strong level of support among school principals, parents, teachers and children for primary science and technology education;
- there is a disparity between the ‘in-principle support for science and technology and that which occurs in practice;
- in those primary schools visited during this study, only 45 to 60 minutes (or about 4% of the teaching time) is allocated in the weekly timetable for both science and technology together;
- many primary teachers (both recent graduates and mid to late career) are less than totally confident about teaching science and technology;
- the availability of resourced materials to support technology education is less extensive and familiar than for science education; and
- primary teachers tend to make only limited use of community resources to support their science and technology teaching.
-

Summary of Recommendations

1. To improve the status of science and technology in the primary curriculum.
2. To improve pre-service teacher education for science and technology:
3. To improve teacher confidence and professional development:
4. To increase science and technology curriculum time:
5. To document and develop technology teaching resources:
6. To encourage better use of community resources.

Almost ten years later, *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* noted similar findings: *“..in primary schools, science is often either not taught or not taught systematically. At the secondary level, too many students lose interest and, even when showing considerable potential, turn away from more demanding courses in science and mathematics.”* (p33)

The report goes on to note that the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering found that *“progress in States and regions is uneven and that there is still a*

long way to go before the nation's schools can deliver on the 1999 Ministerial commitments to science and technology for primary schools.” (p33)

Critically, the shortage of science and mathematics teachers remains the subject of much debate with ad hoc solutions often put forward. It is this failure on the part of government to develop considered public policy on workforce planning in a timely way which will impact negatively on teacher quality and student learning.

10. TERM OF REFERENCE 2

The Standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory

In 2006, the IEUA made a Submission to the Department of Education, Science and Training regarding the possible implementation for an Australian Certificate of Education (ACE). The IEUA's Submission in relation to this proposal goes to the heart of Term of Reference 2 and is provided below.

Part One of Questionnaire **General Information**

1. Introduction

The Independent Education Union of Australia is the federally registered union which represents the professional and industrial interests of teachers and support staff in non-government education institutions including early childhood centres, schools and post secondary training institutions, across all the states and territories of Australia. The union currently has a membership of approximately 63,000.

2. Principles

- 2.1 The IEUA supports work to achieve greater national consistency and comparability in curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification and in other areas of educational policy which contribute to ongoing improvements in learning outcomes.
- 2.2 However, this should not lead to national standardisation or uniformity of teaching approaches and subject curricula or a loss of quality teaching and learning conditions or teachers' industrial conditions
- 2.3 The IEUA supports approaches to pedagogy which can acknowledge and take account of individual learning styles, local needs and cultural and social contexts.
- 2.4 The IEUA believes it is essential for educational change to be implemented in a timely way, following broad consultation with key stakeholders in order to build and achieve consensus. This requires a commitment of resources and support structures to ensure that sufficient

professional development is provided to schools. To not do so is to increase the level of burnout within the profession.

- 2.5 The IEUA supports an approach to educational reform that builds on the strengths of existing policy and procedures in order to achieve stronger comparability and consistency across jurisdictions.
- 2.6 The IEUA supports educational reform that is based upon research, ensures educational validity and integrity and supports teacher professional judgement.
- 2.7 Such principles should inform major educational proposals such as the introduction of an Australian Certificate of Education.

3. An Australian Certificate of Education - General Comment

- 3.1 It is a matter of concern that federal legislation is already in place linking school funding with the introduction of a national certificate. Under the legislation, the deadline for the states and territories to implement national tests is January 2008. Given the complexity of the proposed changes and the significant impact they will have on the organisation of work for students and staff at the senior school levels, the IEUA believes the timeline for this proposal does not give adequate time for consultation and developmental work necessary. The overall policy approach will cause major anxiety for students and teachers and for many in the community.
- 3.2 While supporting the validity for greater national educational consistency and comparability as indicated in 2.1 above, the IEUA believes that the need for an Australian Certificate of Education or national leaving certificate is overstated. It has not been agitated as a policy issue by universities, the teaching profession, State and Territory Ministers (MCEETYA), professional bodies, parent organisations or the community.

The issue came into the public domain in media comments by Federal Minister Nelson in February 2005. He claimed that state-based year 12 assessments cannot be trusted, stating that *“universities are increasingly finding it more difficult to differentiate between our highest-performing students at one end and ...students who probably should not be considered ...to be satisfactory at the other end.”* In particular the HSC *“lacked academic rigour...with parents opting in increasing numbers for the alternative International Baccalaureate”*¹ (this despite the fact that only 70 schools out of 10,000 in the country offer the International Baccalaureate). The IEUA rejects these claims as invalid.

- 3.3 At present, students completing Year 12 or its equivalent, gain entry into higher education institutions through ENTER, the National Tertiary Entrance Rank. At a national consultation meeting in 2005 in relation to

¹ Kelly Burke, Education Reporter SMH February 8 2005

this agenda, representatives from Universities indicated that the current ENTER arrangements work well and that there has been no call from the educational or broader community for a change.

This was made clear at the 7th Education Forum in June 2006 (organised by The Daily Telegraph and the University of Technology, Sydney). Professor George Cooney noted the following:

“The way we calculate the UAI in NSW is the same as that for Victoria and Western Australia. Methods vary across the other states but the underlying assumptions are similarselection indices like the UAI are comparable across the country...There is no need to use the ACE to equate selection ranks from different states – they are already equivalent. A committee that I chair monitors the process on an annual basis.”

- 3.4 Greater effort is needed to make clear to the community that consistency and comparability across jurisdictions broadly exists in the current approaches to curriculum and assessment. If moves proceed to introduce an ACE, it is important that current approaches are accommodated into and strengthened by the new proposals.
- 3.5 The history of Australian education is State and Territory based. The IEUA supports an approach to education policy that is diverse and responsive to the needs of individual students and particular settings rather than uniform standardised and one size fits all. Any development to move to greater uniformity must have the agreement of the State and Territory governments and education community.
- 3.6 The IEUA does not support Standardised Achievements Tests (SAT). In various submissions and policy statements, the IEUA has opposed mass testing – it is limiting and does not give a real measure of student knowledge, understandings and abilities; it can lead to teaching to the test; it narrows the curriculum; and it undermines teacher professionalism.

Part Two of Questionnaire **Your views about the Report’s recommendations**

Recommendation 1 is:

That curriculum essentials be identified—at least in some nominated mathematics, English, science and social science/humanities subjects—to ensure that all Australian students have opportunities to engage with the fundamental knowledge, principles and ideas that make up these disciplines. Essential elements of subject curricula should be identified by national subject panels comprising subject matter and assessment experts and members of the relevant professional subject associations.

Comment

The IEUA is not opposed in principle provided:

- Its ultimate purpose in identifying curriculum essentials is **NOT TO INTRODUCE** some sort of national external exam/testing regime based on common content and an argument that only this approach would ensure national consistency and comparability.
- There is no jeopardy to existing good practice and local diversity at the state and territory level as a result of the overlay of federal policy. It should not be a reductionist exercise.
- Existing educational structures such as State and Territory Boards of Study, subject and professional associations, curriculum and assessment authorities, government and non-government school authorities etc, should be part of the process to identify such curriculum essentials. This would ensure that curriculum essentials are developed from existing state/territory curriculum and align knowledge, principles and ideas etc. Accommodation of relevant and valid approaches at the state and territory level is important. Greater national consistency of overall educational approach is valid.
- The identification of ‘curriculum essentials’ does not include determining specific content – such an approach narrows the learning experience for students and undermines teacher professional judgement.
- The work done in identifying ‘curriculum essentials’ should involve experienced teachers across states and territories. However, the adoption of the curriculum essentials must ultimately be based on agreement from the state and territory authorities and education stakeholders.
- It does not waste important resources by duplicating work already undertaken – for example, the IEUA notes that work with similar purposes has been undertaken by the Curriculum Corporation project on national consistency in the compulsory KLAs and also the effective curriculum consistency work undertaken in NSW for years 3, 5, 7 and 9.
- There is an open and transparent consultative process with the education profession including through their respective representative bodies, such as professional and subject associations and the education unions.
- Essential Learning Outcomes (or similar) presently exist in most jurisdictions and should be the basis for such work and be able to be built on. The question is who is to determine what are “essentials” – for example there is ongoing debate (often very negative of the profession) through the media by education commentators and politicians about what is appropriate teaching and learning and content eg literacy teaching.

- The process must be at arms length from political intervention and/or political commentary. At its recent July meeting, the IEUA federal executive expressed its serious concern at the politicisation of the school curriculum by the Federal Government, with reference in particular to the teaching of Australian history.
- The process needs to respect and accommodate the variation of approaches to curriculum content/renewal and assessment which exists across jurisdictions. For example, external assessment in some states and school based assessment in others and the impact this has on the nature and development of syllabus content.
- The Implementation of a national certificate should have no impact on the amount or nature of testing. In particular, the IEUA is strongly opposed to the implementation of standardised testing as part of a national certificate. This impacts detrimentally on student learning time and is costly.

Recommendation 2 is:

That achievement standards be developed—at least in some nominated English, mathematics, science and social science/humanities subjects—to ensure that students’ results in these subjects can be compared throughout Australia. Achievement standards should be benchmarked internationally and could take the form of A to E grades in a subject.

Comments (optional)

- The IEUA is not opposed in principle to the development of nationally consistent achievement standards subject to their being developed through consultation and agreement at the state and territory level. However, the IEUA reiterates its concern stated in the first dot point to Recommendation 1 that this not become a default national testing regime nor an educationally inappropriate reporting framework.
- It is important that experienced classroom practitioners and subject assessment experts be involved in the development of such standards.
- There are lessons to consider in the recent public debate related to the implementation of the federal government’s requirements for A-E reporting (with the accompanying threats to funding). It produced major discontent from the profession and criticism from parents because of its inadequacies. Employing authorities were also concerned but mute because of their signed agreements accepting the tie to funding. The IEUA expressed its strong concern about the disjunction and lack of coherence between curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting and the respective standards underpinning them in a number of jurisdictions.
- Curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, reporting and certification are interconnected. The IEUA raised this with the Federal Minister noting that in a number of jurisdictions, major changes to curriculum were half way through implementation – teachers protested that the federal governments A-E reporting requirements should not occur prior to the state curriculum changes without the

establishment and validation of standards. Teachers seriously questioned the educational integrity of the new reporting requirements and their capacity to cause public criticism, undermine public confidence and to jeopardise their professional standing. School authorities felt unable to respond to these legitimate concerns because of the funding agreements.

- There is a similar story in relation to the curriculum changes in WA where teachers and the community opposed major curriculum reorganisation – the result of a top down approach, poor consultation with the profession, no commitment to professional development and resources.
- The same issues may be relevant for these proposals. The implementation issues are problematic. The need to establish structures which facilitate considered consultation with experienced classroom teachers is fundamental. The teaching and learning relationship between teachers and students at senior levels is critically important. Students will not want to be guinea pigs – and neither will their parents want that.
- How would national achievement standards be developed in a timely way, taking account of the consultation requirements and the different approaches across jurisdictions, while at the same time ensuring that students, parents and the community remain confident that there is no disadvantage to students?
- The costs involved in development, validation and implementation of the various elements (curriculum, assessment and reporting) and the bureaucracy to do it and oversee it will be significant. The IEUA does not believe this is the best way to spend stretched education dollars.
- The danger in the end is that political expediency will mean that the necessary validation processes and consultation processes to ensure broad community support will not occur.

Recommendation 3 is :

That, as part of the Australian Certificate of Education, all students undertake a national Key Capabilities Assessment part way through Year 12 of a number of key skills.

Comments (optional)

- The IEUA does not support the requirement that all year 12 students undertake a national Key Capabilities Assessment (KCA). It would not be the appropriate assessment to achieve national consistency and comparability because it is too narrow. Essentially, it is a basic skills test for employability skills. It will not moderate the differences between the jurisdictions – and neither does it need to (see 3.5 above).

- The IEUA is opposed to basic skills testing as it leads to a lowering of the quality of education and the overall level of student achievement; and because of the dubious educational validity of the instruments of testing. The Key Capabilities Assessment as proposed has the danger of narrowing the curriculum with less emphasis on curriculum content and less consideration of such elements as creativity, problem solving, personal development and social development.
- Again it is costly and resource intensive and would distract from the work which students now struggle to complete. Year 12 is the critical year for students and the workload is heavy for students and teachers. Across a number of jurisdictions, students already must complete major pieces of assessment work or external assessment. A further test will increase the pressure on students and their teachers.

Recommendation 4 is :

That an ACE Award of Excellence be introduced. This Award would be issued by the Australian Minister for Education, Science and Training to students who meet international standards of excellence in their school subjects and on the Key Capabilities Assessment.

Comments

- This proposal is not opposed – certificates are currently issued by state and territory ministers. A similar national certificate, consistent with the criteria for state certificates, could be introduced.

Recommendation 5 is :

That a national standards body be established for this purpose. This body would not be an awarding body, but would be responsible for identifying essential curriculum content in nominated school subjects, developing achievement standards and managing the annual Key Capabilities Assessment.

- The IEUA is opposed to the setting up of a stand-alone national standards body which is independent of state and territory curriculum and assessment authorities.
- There is a role for coordination and any structure set up to do this must involve the state and territory curriculum authorities, education systems and the education unions who are the largest representative body for teachers in Australia.

The IEUA believes that such a body could be under the auspices of MCEETYA

Recommendation 6 is :

That all students in the final years of secondary school be given access to the Australian Certificate of Education. Following agreement to incorporate essential curriculum content in nominated subjects, to report against common achievement standards, and to incorporate the Key Capabilities Assessment, each of the

existing senior secondary certificates would be eligible to become the Australian Certificate of Education.

Comments (optional)

- The IEUA believes there are many issues which remain highly contentious. The union does not support this recommendation while the issues raised in respect to the preceding recommendations remain unresolved.
- The connection of federal funding to this agenda undermines the capacity for robust debate, independence and critical distance. Key stakeholders have made very significant criticisms of the proposals. The IEUA strongly rejects this approach on the part of the federal government to education change and reform.
- These changes have significant implications at all levels of the education enterprise – and the proposed timeline for their introduction is totally inadequate. The current proposal will mean that consultation will be limited and consensus will be jeopardised.
- The IEUA does not believe the rationale or need for an Australian Certificate of Education has been argued convincingly. Refer to the sections on Principles and Commentary above. The IEUA supports national consistency and comparability and believes key stakeholders would work cooperatively to consider where current approaches require changing (as they have in the past) without the use of the funding stick.
- International assessment regimes have shown that Australian students are achieving at very high levels in key learning areas compared to other OECD countries. The IEUA believes this demonstrates the present structures at the state and territory levels for the delivery of education have produced high standards of student learning outcomes.
- Issues of resourcing, implementation planning, professional development, consultation etc are not adequately addressed.

ATTACHMENT A

PRINCIPLES FOR A FRAMEWORK OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Accountability is an integral part of the education process. The IEUA believes that accountability and rights are interconnected. Systems and schools are responsible to their students for ensuring they have an effective learning environment and students and their parents are entitled to know from teachers how well their students are learning.
2. Approaches to pedagogy should acknowledge and take account of and respect individual learning styles, local needs and cultural and social contexts. All students are entitled to intellectual and personal development in a context of respect of identity and culture. Successful schools are those which involve students and families in their development, operations and decision-making.
3. Teachers are best placed to make professional judgements about relevant and appropriate approaches to curriculum and to the assessment and reporting of student achievements.
4. While there are valid arguments for greater national consistency and comparability in curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification and in other areas of educational policy, this should not lead to national standardisation or uniformity of teaching and assessment approaches and subject curriculum or a loss of quality teaching and learning conditions or teachers' industrial conditions.
5. National educational reform needs to be based upon research, to be fair and equitable for all students and teachers, to ensure educational validity and integrity, to support teacher professional judgement and to provide the opportunities for relevant and self-determined professional learning which can support and strengthen professional practice.
6. Educational change should be implemented in a timely way, following broad consultation with key stakeholders in order to build and achieve consensus. This requires an approach to educational reform that builds on the strengths of existing policy and procedures in order to achieve stronger comparability and consistency across jurisdictions.
7. There must be commitment of resources and support structures to ensure there is high quality professional development for teachers about educational reforms including those related to assessment, evaluation and reporting of student achievement. There must also be a comprehensive strategy to inform all stakeholders about the reforms. To not do so is to jeopardise the policy implementation, to undermine confidence on the part of students, their parents and the broader community and to increase the level of burnout and disillusionment within the profession.

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