

**A SUBMISSION BY THE
AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL
OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REMOTE
EDUCATION**

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That free public schooling, to year twelve or equivalent, be available in all communities and that it be fully funded to ensure that all children are entitled to an education guarantee. This must involve a commitment by federal and state governments to the provision of differential funding necessary to meet the additional costs of schooling in rural and remote locations. The AEU believes that every child is entitled to:

- be a member of a class no larger than 20
- have access to a comprehensive curriculum which includes each of the curriculum areas detailed in the National Goals of Schooling
- be taught by teachers qualified in the subject and in teaching the subject and have access to specialist teachers of Physical Education, Music, Art and Craft and LOTE
- be taught by a teacher who has guaranteed access to opportunities to maintain their knowledge and skills
- have the assistance of appropriately skilled support staff
- be provided with a range of cultural and sporting opportunities such as learning to play a musical instrument, take part in dramatic activities, and participating in individual and team sports
- experience structured learning programs in the world of work
- understand their learning progress through rich and authentic assessment and reporting mechanisms
- have access to a personal computer, the Internet and a personal email address
- have access to adequate levels of guidance and welfare services.

2. That preschool education must be an integral part of early childhood education offered by a high quality, properly resourced, public system. It must be publicly funded, free and accessible for at least all four years olds regardless of geographic location.

3. That a 'skills guarantee' be introduced to ensure at least one year of free, post compulsory education for all young people and that this provision be ensured irrespective of geographic location.

4. That a 'Disadvantaged Areas Program'(DAP) be introduced. The DAP should be a Commonwealth targeted program aimed at whole of community development and include significant funding for those educational issues previously addressed by CAP and equity funding along with an affirmative employment component for young people. This program would provide comprehensive support for communities to shape future development. DAP would; be based in low SES neighborhoods, regions and communities; involve strong local and community elements; be enabled by government funding; combine industry policy, job creation, job placement, skills training; provide increased community welfare support and services; identify appropriate target groups within that area; and be underpinned by a long term Education Equity Program, involving Full Service Educational Institutions which place the school and other public education settings at the heart of the community and integrate the total approach.

5. Wherever possible governments should ensure that students are able to attend a public education facility. If distances creates difficulties, governments should provide funds for

transportation, technology and or the provision of government boarding schools as close as possible to the place of residence.

6. State/territory governments should be required and, in the short term, to put in place simple strategies such as the provision of carpets for classrooms which will have an immediate impact on improving the learning capacity of Indigenous students with hearing difficulties. In the longer term appropriate design options for schools in remote communities should be developed in conjunction with these local communities.

7. Improving the sub standard nature of housing for teachers in rural and remote communities should be a priority of all state/territory governments.

8. State and Territory systems should establish rural and remote information technology strategies which focus on sustaining the development and use of information technology through proper installation of all hardware and software, provision of staff training and development in it's use (where possible on site) and funding for comprehensive maintenance programs.

9. There is an immediate need to address the problem of supply shortages of qualified teachers for rural and remote schools. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should be encouraged to meet with representatives from teacher unions to develop strategies to address this crisis. These strategies should include, but not be limited to:

- the development and funding of a remote teaching service award which contains provisions to compensate for the real costs of living in these communities and provide incentives to retain qualified staff here;
- the development of professional development programs for teachers in rural and remote communities, including the allocation of funds to sustain such programs;
- the development of induction programs which ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to take up their teaching position in rural and remote communities.
- measures to address the particular concerns of women teachers in order to encourage them to continue employment in these localities including: facilitating access to appropriate pre and post natal care for pregnant women; the provision of greater support services and improved entitlements for employees in rural and remote communities who become pregnant; facilitating access to affordable, good quality childcare; developing strategies to overcome fears about personal safety and security; developing community based programs that are designed to promote the positives of having women in leadership positions to these communities.

10. That all future Commonwealth, state and territory policies and strategies be developed and delivered in a context that recognises, and takes full account of, the cultural history, identity, diversity and ongoing educational disadvantage of Indigenous peoples.

11. That the focus of all future education and training for Indigenous peoples be on the consolidation and implementation of the many excellent initiatives outlined in reports over the 10 year period covered by the Inquiry.

12. That a coordinated consultative national approach be adopted to ensure that culturally appropriate best practice informs all Indigenous education and training needs. Further that to ensure certainty, consistency and cultural appropriateness in the delivery of education and

training to Indigenous people, a National Indigenous Advisory Body inclusive of all Indigenous education stakeholders and with representation from all States and Territories be established as the primary advisory body on all education and training matters.

13. That in order to fulfill the commitment made at the April 1999 meeting, MCEETYA initiate a process of consultation with Indigenous education groups and other interested parties to develop a strategy for the implementation of measures in line with recommendations in the various reports which will facilitate meeting its targets.

INTRODUCTION

The AEU thanks the HREOC for the opportunity to make this submission and congratulates the Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Chris Sidoti on his decision to initiate this particular inquiry which the AEU would suggest is long overdue, and the attempts that he has made (within what we understand is a very limited budget) to meet with teachers, parents and community members in a variety of rural and remote settings.

At the outset however the AEU wishes to make the HREOC aware of our concerns about the progress of recommendations emanating from the Inquiry. The area of rural and remote education, including key questions about the provision of education to Indigenous peoples, is one that has been much 'reviewed'. Many of our members working within the area are cynical about further reviews which go over old ground but are seen to lead to little substantive change. We believe that what is required now is action not further reviews. Within this context we recognise that this Inquiry however has a different flavour because of its particular emphasis on human rights and therefore governmental responsibility to deliver quality education to all as a fundamental human right.

We therefore look forward to the outcomes from the Inquiry which we hope will be directed at, and engage governments in, initiatives to promote improvements in the accessibility and delivery of quality public education to all students within Australia regardless of geographic location or socio-economic background.

Given the extent to which the area has been reviewed in the past the AEU submission and recommendations will largely draw together the many areas that have been identified through numerous reports as requiring attention. We also aim to point out the context of the broader social, political and economic changes which we believe are impacting on the provision of education to rural and remote communities.

In summary the AEU wishes to raise with the Inquiry the following key matters:

That governments must give priority to meeting their obligations to promote human rights through the maintenance and sustenance of quality free, universal and secular public education.

That Australia is not meeting its obligation to honour its commitments to provide for the above and that Australians in rural and remote communities are some of the most disadvantaged by Australian governments not meeting these obligations.

That to deliver equality in educational provision to rural and remote Australians affirmative strategies and differential (higher) funding and targeted support mechanisms are required.

That Indigenous education and remoteness are inextricably linked and dealing with remote education requires the implementation of the many recommendations aimed at improving Indigenous education.

That Australian governments have failed to adequately sustain the physical and human resources that will ensure the provision of quality education to rural and remote Australians.

That establishment and development of a high status teaching profession must be the cornerstone of any strategy to improve educational opportunities for students in rural and remote communities.

About the Australian Education Union (AEU)

The AEU represents 155,000 educators employed in public pre-schools, schools and post-school educational institutions throughout Australia. AEU members work as teachers, principals, administrators and allied educational staff (including Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers, (AIEWs)) in kindergartens, schools and TAFE.

The AEU campaigns with and for its members, and for those who rely on public education as students and parents, to achieve the highest standards of educational and employment outcomes.

The AEU pursues these goals through workplace and community action as well as through courts and tribunals. It also initiates and assists in the development of research and policy on key educational issues and advocates for the development and sustenance of quality public education systems.

The Importance of Public Education

Free universal, secular, public schooling is a cornerstone of our democracy and must be accepted by all governments as a right of citizenship.

Public education has a 150 year history in Australia. The free secular public school emerged as a settlement between competing religious interests. The Catholic Church and small but very wealthy sections of our community sat outside of this agreement and have, to this day, continued to run their own schools. As a consequence of this and of increasing demand from other religions and ethnic or community groupings Australia is again facing a set of competing demands around schooling. In the 1990's these demands are not simply about the right to establish sectarian schools but the right to government funding in order to facilitate "choice". Thus the 1990's have given birth to the de-regulation of schooling such that anyone can now open a school and receive government funding.

As we enter the 21st century we are again facing a societal context where our children are increasingly divided, through schooling, by wealth, religion or race. Apart from our concerns for long term social cohesion, the myth of choice is placing educational guarantees of curriculum breadth, specialist teaching staff, infrastructure investment and in many places a local public school at risk. Public schools are significantly underfunded and voluntary contributions by parents are now viewed as fees such that many children are denied core educational experience where parents can't afford to pay. These realities were recognised by Ken McKinnon in his Review of the New Schools Policy for the federal government in 1996;

Choice is easier to use as a rhetorical term than it is to operationalise, at least for the funding of schools. Generalised support for the concept of everyone having maximum choice does not translate into a system which can realistically fund all conceivable options. Nor is choice an unambiguous good. Increased choice for some may result in decreased choice for others. Choice in all schools may be limited in an area where enrolments are limited, and the more thinly spread the more limited the curriculum.

The limits to choice are particularly relevant in rural and remote locations where the struggle is to effect a minimal curriculum guarantee. It is also our view that the smaller the community the greater the risk of damage to social cohesion generated by segregating a community's children.

That does not mean we are unsympathetic to the concerns of religious communities within our schools. The AEU recognises and supports the right to religious tolerance and consequently we believe that the challenge is for the churches to propose how we can best integrate their needs into a quality public system where all children can be guaranteed a quality education.

Likewise the TAFE sector provides an indispensable education and training role for rural and remote communities. Often the local TAFE Institute is a first point of post-school educational contact for young people seeking job skills and further education and for the multitudinous needs of mature age learners in these communities.

Rural and remote post-school learners express a diverse array of education and training needs however, despite the vast network of TAFE Institutes many people in rural and remote communities confront significant barriers to post-school education participation.

TAFE programs have critical social and community functions in rural and remote communities. The use of new learning technologies such as the internet and on line communications can assist in extending the vocational learning environment for these communities but mainstream educational provision should be actively inclusive of diverse language and cultures found in rural and particularly isolated areas. The viability of TAFE policies is being threatened by privatisation, user pays policies and the withdrawal of growth funding by the federal government.

The Impact of Change on Rural and Isolated Communities

The state of educational provision can not be fully understood without understanding the extent to which social and economic forces have impacted on rural and remote Australia.

Major aspects of change include:

- Rural restructuring - including structural changes to farming threatening the existence of small settlements.
- Urban restructuring of country towns towards the establishment of regional centres often dominated by metropolitan based service providers.

- The decline of regional centres through the restructuring of the public sector and the application of economic rationalist policies by private sector service providers including banks etc.
- The decline in resource development potential - particularly the mining sector.

The impact of this change includes:

- Widespread social and economic dislocation.
- Higher rates of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment.
- Higher rates of youth suicide and attempted youth suicide.
- Population drain towards urban centres.

The AEU raises these matters to demonstrate four important points:

- The extent to which social and economic forces have impacted on rural and isolated communities and therefore the availability of opportunities within those communities.
- To indicate the level of social and economic distress that surrounds the learning of students within these communities.
- To support the view that for many students and their parents the local school provides the most significant stable institution. This has placed an inordinate burden on schools who are seen as being responsible for fixing and managing the social dislocation associated with the above changes.
- To argue that governments (Commonwealth and State/Territory) have a responsibility to make special and significant provision for the sustenance and development of public education within rural and isolated communities in order to attempt to address the impact of the above changes.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Governments must accept that they have obligations to provide quality secular, free public education as a fundamental human right.

The commitments to education inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the more recent UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) provide a set of benchmarks for any discussion regarding educational guarantees afforded to Australian children in rural and remote locations.

Articles 26 and 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights have particular significance:

.....Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (Article 26/1)

.....Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancements and its benefits.

Without limiting the importance of Articles 12,13,14, 23,24,26,29,31 & 34 of the CROC Article 28 is of specific significance.

.....State parties shall recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively, and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall in particular:

- 1. make primary education compulsory and available free to all;*
- 2. encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need.*
- 3. make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means.....*

On Sunday September 30th 1990, a great promise was made to the children of the 1990's. 71 Presidents and Prime Ministers came together for the First World Summit for Children. The outcome was a commitment to make available the resources to end child deaths and child malnutrition and to provide protection for the normal physical and mental development of all the world's children.

Following this, in 1991, Governments again came together at UNESCO's World Conference 'Education For All' in Jomtien, Thailand. They acknowledged the central role of education and adopted a more detailed charter of commitment's designed to turn the sentiments of the title into a global reality. Thus children's rights encompass established rights to education; rights which can only be guaranteed if free, universal, secular, schools - public schools - are available to every community and if vocational education and higher education are accessible

tertiary options. As we enter the 21st century this is not the case for too many young Australians living in rural and remote communities. Further, if governments are guilty of neglect of public education generally then they must face even greater condemnation for lack of access to and/or inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes from education in rural and remote areas.

In addition an extension of Australia's responsibility to further human rights, second chance educational opportunities for those who have not completed secondary school and who do not wish to return to a traditional school environment should be afforded to rural and remote citizens.

ACCESS, PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOMES

Evidence demonstrates that Australian governments are failing their human rights obligations.

How the Figures Stack Up

Australia, a rich nation, is increasingly failing the human rights tests in regard to our children:

- Communities are not guaranteed a local school and public education is no longer free.
- Breadth of curriculum choice in secondary schools is unequal across urban and rural settings.
- There is no cohesive national, state or territory plan to guarantee technological infrastructure which might facilitate curriculum access.
- No national, state or territory government has yet adequately invested in online curriculum development such that existing curriculum is universally available, let alone provided for access to practical disciplines or structured workplace experience through simulation.
- Despite research which supports early childhood education experience as a positive contribution to improvement in later educational achievement there is no guaranteed provision and thus inadequate funding for pre-school education.
- The prospect of long term unemployment is four times greater for those students who fail to complete year twelve or equivalent and yet retention rates in secondary schools are again falling.
- Access to vocational education and training is not universal and increasingly university education is unaffordable for the average Australian.

Retention Rates

The disparities between educational and economic outcomes for young people in rural and remote Australia vis a vis their urban counterparts are serious. Retention rates fall significantly below the state/territory average as the degree of isolation increases. The national retention rates for schooling are 71.8%, a far cry short of the national target of 90% established by the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael Reports of the early 1990's.

A breakdown of retention, and more significantly, year twelve completion rates should generate alarm amongst both systems and government ministers. For example the 1996 National Report on Schooling which collected data on completion rates shows that only 44% of males in isolated settings completed year twelve compared with 73% of urban females and 63% of urban males.

Educational Outcomes and Achievement Levels

While the data on educational outcomes is largely locked away in the records of state/territory systems there are some disturbing indicators on the public record. The National Schools English Literacy Survey (1997) provided significant evidence that students in urban schools tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement than students in rural schools (up to ten points on the literacy scale). Further, the population groupings of Indigenous students in rural areas are significant and the outcomes of the Special Indigenous sample have literacy achievement levels 3 - 4 years below students in the main sample.

ACER's August 1999 Research Report No. 11 on *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* provides evidence that school achievement has a substantial effect on early school leaving; i.e. the odds of leaving schools increase substantially with lower levels of school achievement. This is not a radical finding but the challenge for schools to increase equality of outcomes is magnified when success equates directly with the potential for students to access a full range of life opportunities. This is particularly relevant when ACER Research (Report No. 13 of September 1999) confirms that:

- Year 12 completion rates for rural students are below the national average and that an improvement in the relative position of rural youth during the 1980's did not continue into the early 1990's.
- Students from rural areas were less likely than other students to make the transition from year twelve to higher education.

If you consider the findings detailed in *The Cost to Australia of Early School Leaving (Dusseldorp Skills Forum - October 1999)* that the overall cost to Australia of one year's early school leavers is an estimated \$2.6 billion, then the funding is certainly available to design and implement affirmative programs for rural youth.

The AEU advocates a 'skills guarantee' of at least one year of free post compulsory education for all young people as well as access to further education on merit. This in turn requires that TAFE provision be expanded for universal provision. Such provision can be through stand alone institutions, partnership arrangements with schools or where required online provision. Higher education must also become increasingly available such that rural residents are not forced to re-locate or become educationally marginalised.

Funding

In general Australian Governments have failed to maintain investment levels (see [Appendix 1](http://www.edunions.labor.net.au/aeu/Debates/Brisgraphs/index.html) at <http://www.edunions.labor.net.au/aeu/Debates/Brisgraphs/index.html>) for public schools, pursued a narrow choice agenda, and in the case of the Federal Government demonstrated funding bias to the private sector. Had all governments accepted the responsibility for maintaining funding levels, per percentage of GDP, at the levels expended in the early 1980's their would be \$5 billion more per annum in school budgets alone.

National Concern for Rural Education

The last significant national report on rural education was produced by the Schools Commission in 1987. Entitled *Schooling in Rural Australia* it provides a comprehensive

overview of access, funding, curriculum provision, distance education services, cultural and economic diversity in rural Australia and the educational and social experiences of rural students.

Key recommendations are attached at Appendix 2 (not included in this electronic version) and all of the areas are still critical today;

- financial assistance for children in remote locations;
- curriculum development to ensure breadth of access for rural students. Today this should be considered in the context of digital curriculum development and online provision;
- increased access to student support through AUSTUDY & ABSTUDY;
- the establishment of a rural - urban exchange program for students; and possibly for teachers;
- professional development support for teachers;
- access to off-campus teacher education for rural residents who aspire to be teachers in local or other rural settings. This is critical in the current context of an emerging supply crisis;
- an IT plan to ensure modern communication and learning environments with appropriate materials and teacher training provision;
- increased funding for the Country Areas Program (CAP). Today we would argue to re-establish a national targeted program with substantial differential resources to support equality of outcomes through research, guaranteed student access, cultural and educational experiences and teacher development.

As relevant today as it was in 1987 this report represented the culmination of more than a decade of concern by the Commission in regard to rurality and educational disadvantage. In 1975 the Schools Commission identified country students as an educationally disadvantaged group with special needs and funding requirements.

In the report titled *Quality and Equality* (1985) the Commission argued that there was an urgent need to address issues of concern in regard to rural education at a national, state and local level. Subsequently the Country Areas Program (CAP) was established. Evaluated in 1997 by Charles Sturt University the research team found that CAP:

- helps ensure that students who stay on to complete their schooling are equipped for post-school life in employment or further study similarly to students of equivalent abilities in schools in larger centres;
- plays a significant role in all its target schools, and a crucial role in the smaller ones in enabling those schools to present a curriculum at least as rich and diverse as comparable schools in less isolated locations;
- has a major impact on the social and cultural life of isolated schools and their communities, enabling talents and skills that would be unaffordable or otherwise missed to be brought into those communities and facilitating for students, their parents and teachers opportunities to experience life beyond their small towns;

- plays an important role in empowering small isolated communities providing roles for people to become involved in school education, encouraging local determination of need and decision making, helping resource those communities and lessening the economic burden of schooling that is a consequence of geographic isolation.

It is regrettable that the Federal Government has now abandoned the targeted base of this program and only two states maintain ‘declared areas’ and involve local decision making structures. The loss of the rural focus of the program to a more generic spotlight on literacy and numeracy is keenly felt by all stakeholders. New arrangements do not take account of educational priorities specific to isolation. Further there is considerable strength of feeling that the central determination of priorities can undermine one of CAP’s strengths - the local determination of needs.

The loss of the CAP program is felt even more keenly in those states who have also followed the federal government’s lead and abandoned the National Equity Strategy in terms of a clear and focused poverty program.

As we approach the 21st century poverty is a serious issue in Australia

Gregory and Hunter (1995) considered changes in indicators such as household income, unemployment, and education based on ABS collection districts (CDs), between 1976 and 1991. Their findings showed a dramatic increase in the relationship between neighbourhood and elements of financial well being. They found:

- Income distribution had become more unequal and the change was extraordinary.
- There was a significant increase in the geographic polarisation of household income across Australia. The poor were increasingly living together in one set of neighbourhoods and the rich in (an)other set.
- The economic gap was widening.
- It was evident that income inequality had increased across neighbourhoods for both genders and by substantial amounts.
- Males in the lowest CDs had been much more affected by unemployment.
- For the top half of neighbourhoods the proportion of women employed increased approximately 10%. For the bottom half of neighbourhoods employment fell by 40%.
- The decline in manufacturing had disproportionately reduced employment in low SES neighbourhoods.

Thus in general terms:

- Inequity is increasing.

- The relationship between low incomes, unemployment and neighborhood is considerable and has increased.
- The relationship between neighborhood and education outcomes is also considerable.
- Family income is becoming more important in terms of a child's life chances.
- Inequity/poverty is both intergenerational and neighborhood based.

If one then layers over these factors such as changes in government student support, and the deterioration in childcare, it is clear that there is strong evidence that young people in certain neighborhoods face overwhelming odds in terms of achieving sufficiently high education results to break out of an inter generational poverty trap.

Those living in areas of high unemployment and/or low income face extreme disadvantages in making the transition to adulthood and employment. They are likely to suffer not only educational disadvantage, but probably lack the ability to form networks (the most common method of obtaining employment) and the ability to develop key competencies and sufficient control over language to deal with common oral communication.

Without concerted support disadvantaged communities and/or individuals are unlikely to break out of the cycle of the poverty trap they find themselves in by virtue of where they live.

The AEU is advocating the creation of special programs targeted at disadvantaged neighborhoods, regions and communities in appropriate political and educational forums. Such programs would provide comprehensive support and :

- be based in low SES neighborhoods, regions and communities;
- involve strong local and community elements;
- be enabled by government funding;
- combine industry policy, job creation, job placement, skills training;
- provide increased community welfare support and services;
- identify appropriate target groups within that area;
- and be underpinned by a long term Education Equity Program, involving Full Service Educational Institutions which place the school and other public education settings at the heart of the community and integrate the total approach.

In this context governments must initiate programs to dramatically increase the range of ongoing employment opportunities available to young people who are not students.

Such programs should :

- encourage well-paid and more stable employment rather than low paid and low skilled work;
- include policies which stimulate employer demand for youth labour and especially early school leavers and which encourage employers to hire young people into ongoing employment;
- provide structured training, learning and skill development opportunities;

- result in a more equal distribution of working hours;
- have clearly defined career pathways;
- provide training in occupational health and safety rights and obligations;
- encourage the development of industrial democracy and knowledge of industrial rights and the role of unions;
- ensure fairer income distribution;
- stimulate groups to provide an intermediary or bridging role between young persons, schools, employers and training organisations;
- establish Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) to ensure an integrated local community approach;
- provide specific intervention/re-entry strategies;
- lead to lifelong learning opportunities;
- be based on an understanding of the relationship between youth and their community and have a 'whole community support' basis.

Targeted programs such as those described above must be built on the foundations of free universal public education. Escalating poverty and entrenched unemployment is widening the gap between rich and poor in Australia. Voluntary contributions are increasingly being viewed as quasi fees in Australia's public schools which means core educational experiences are now dependent on parents' capacity to pay. Evidence of the cost of public schooling can be found in a number of reports including the Senate Committee's Not a Level Playground and the Smith Family's Free Education: Who Can Afford It?

The Senate Inquiry found that around 7% of total funding was being raised through community effort in public schools. This is up to a 1/3 of the running costs, over and above staffing outlays, in some schools and consumes valuable teacher time as schools struggle to make ends meet.

The Smith Family's research showed that many parents could not afford to let their children participate in the full range of experiences offered within the school system. For example:

- 62% of those asked to purchase computer discs for a course their child was taking could not afford it.
- 50% could not participate in school camps.
- 24% could not participate in sports activities.
- 15% could not participate in school excursions.

Recommendations

1. That free public schooling, to year twelve or equivalent, be available in all communities and that it be fully funded to ensure that all children are entitled to an education guarantee. This must involve a commitment by federal and state governments to the provision of differential funding necessary to meet the additional costs of schooling in rural and remote locations. The AEU believes that every child is entitled to:
 - be a member of a class no larger than 20
 - have access to a comprehensive curriculum which includes each of the curriculum areas detailed in the National Goals of Schooling

- be taught by teachers qualified in the subject and in teaching the subject and have access to specialist teachers of Physical Education, Music, Art and Craft and LOTE
 - be taught by a teacher who has guaranteed access to opportunities to maintain their knowledge and skills
 - have the assistance of appropriately skilled support staff
 - be provided with a range of cultural and sporting opportunities such as learning to play a musical instrument, take part in dramatic activities, and participating in individual and team sports
 - experience structured learning programs in the world of work
 - understand their learning progress through rich and authentic assessment and reporting mechanisms
 - have access to a personal computer, the Internet and a personal email address
 - have access to adequate levels of guidance and welfare services
2. That preschool education must be an integral part of early childhood education offered by a high quality, properly resourced, public system. It must be publicly funded, free and accessible for at least all four years olds regardless of geographic location.
 3. That a 'skills guarantee' be introduced to ensure at least one year of free, post compulsory education for all young people and that this provision be ensured irrespective of geographic location.
 4. That a 'Disadvantaged Areas Program'(DAP) be introduced. The DAP should be a Commonwealth targeted program aimed at whole of community development and include significant funding for those educational issues previously addressed by CAP and equity funding along with an affirmative employment component for young people. This program would provide comprehensive support for communities to shape future development. DAP would;
 - be based in low SES neighborhoods, regions and communities;
 - involve strong local and community elements;
 - be enabled by government funding;
 - combine industry policy, job creation, job placement, skills training;
 - provide increased community welfare support and services;
 - identify appropriate target groups within that area;
 - and be underpinned by a long term Education Equity Program, involving Full Service Educational Institutions which place the school and other public education settings at the heart of the community and integrate the total approach.

ELEMENTS OF QUALITY - PHYSICAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Urgent attention must be directed towards the provision of funds, infrastructure and support mechanisms to deliver quality in terms of physical and human resources to rural and remote education.

The requirements on Australian governments to make education available to all extend to questions around the quality of education provided. It is not sufficient to say that access to education is available. In our view the requirements on government extend to ensuring equality for all in terms of the quality aspects of educational provision.

The AEU submits that the first priority of all Australian governments should be to ensure the existence of a free and high quality public education system. In many cases ensuring the quality of access in rural and isolated communities requires affirmative policies and innovative initiatives.

Physical Resources

Access to public schools

Wherever possible governments should ensure that students are able to attend a public education facility. Government policies, pre-occupied with market driven approaches to education (including purchaser provider splits, competitive tendering and income generation at the school based level), such as those of the previous Victorian Government have undermined this objective through the closure of public schools in local communities. This approach to marketisation which includes a reliance on fundraising for core physical amenities bears no resemblance to the realities of rural and remote communities and their ability to meet these requirements.

Additionally the AEU is aware of significant school populations, in isolated communities, (example Domadgee ,QLD with over 200 school age children) where no school exists. Areas such as this should be immediately identified and listed for capital works and infrastructure programs.

Where distances create difficulties the emphasis should be on providing facilities as close as practical to the place of residence and in a manner which enhances public provision and public schools within the regional area.

Quality Buildings and Grounds

School buildings and grounds should be maintained at a quality standard and should have sufficient maintenance budgets. If students are to value learning, and their communities value education, the physical learning environment must be a pleasant one. This will also assist in the retention of quality teaching staff. The AEU has particular concerns about the physical standards of schools in a number of rural and Indigenous communities and also about the extent of the use of transportable classrooms, with insufficient cooling and heating arrangements etc that are used as 'permanent' classrooms in many rural localities.

Further the design and make-up of buildings must be appropriate for their use. For example the use of transportables and hard-floor classrooms in Indigenous communities where over 80 per cent of children have hearing difficulties is a travesty. This major impediment to learning can be alleviated through simple design changes to classrooms and the provision of monies to purchase carpets. These small changes should be able to be rectified immediately without controversy.

Concerns about physical amenities extend to the provision of adequate quality housing for teachers in these localities. Almost all state/territory systems have examples of poor quality and insufficient numbers of houses. This forces single teachers to live in shared accommodation and the majority of teachers to live in sub standard arrangements and in turn has a major impact on teacher turnover in these areas. In some parts of some states/territories (for example WA and NT) the issue of teacher housing is at crisis point with schools not able to increase staffing levels even though student numbers allow for this because housing is not available.

Information Technology Resources

Whilst information technology can be utilised to overcome barriers experienced by students in rural and isolated areas it can not replace the benefits of students having regular contact with appropriately qualified teachers. Further the AEU is concerned about the extent to which the provision of hardware is seen as an end in itself. Education systems cannot rely solely on technology to deliver quality of education to students in rural and remote localities because of: the inadequacies of telecommunications technology in remote Australia; the fact that systems do not have well developed and supported infrastructure arrangements; and because it will never entirely replace the benefits for students learning in a collaborative environment.

Arrangements that rely on students learning through information technology must include a component for interaction with qualified teachers and other students. Funding therefore should be available to either facilitate distance educators to travel to students at regular intervals or to allow students to attend residential programs or preferably a combination of both of these strategies. The AEU is aware that the current levels of systems funding of distance education programs is not sufficient to occur in any sustained and co-ordinated manner.

The AEU is aware of a number of circumstances within which information technology hardware is not being effectively utilised due to a range of factors including: the technical arrangements for installation not having occurred; lack of training and development for staff on the use of hardware and software (how can teachers educate students when they don't have the skills themselves); and non-existent maintenance facilities/arrangements.

Human Resources

The quality and status of teaching

The quality of education that students in rural and remote communities receive is inexplicably linked to the quality of the human resources; (teachers and allied education workers) who contribute to this process. This fact was recognised by the Employment Education and Training References Committee of the Australian Senate in it's Inquiry in the Status of the

Teaching Profession. Whilst the findings and the recommendations of the Committee generally relate to the teaching profession generally, the AEU is of the view that the situation in rural and remote localities cannot be improved whilst measures to improve and recognise the status of teaching as a profession are being ignored.

The Status of Teaching Inquiry emphasised that at the heart of quality education are quality teachers. It recommended initiatives in key areas including:

- the need for ongoing professional development;
- the need for comprehensive recruitment and training processes for new teachers which meet enforceable standards;
- the establishment of systems of professional recognition and teacher registration.

In addition to the above initiatives there are a number of affirmative strategies and policies that must be initiated in order to ensure the availability of quality teaching staff and therefore quality learning outcomes in rural and remote communities. The AEU therefore suggests that the following matters require urgent attention:

Supply

It is widely recognised that Australia is set to experience a teacher shortage. Much of this shortage is due to the lack of attention paid to maintaining and improving the status of teaching as a profession.

There is a serious and immediate need to arrest the declining supply of teachers across both Primary and Secondary sectors and for all States and systems in the country. In a recent study (Preston 1999) the projections for supply indicate that the expected number of teacher education graduates will be inadequate to meet demand.

The broad findings show that for primary teachers only about 81% of necessary demand will be met by 2004 and for secondary teachers only 66% of demand will be available on current trends.

Rural and remote schools are already experiencing supply shortages. The consequences of these shortages include not being able to fill staff absences for sick leave, other kinds of leave or attendance at professional development and a particular and ongoing shortage of teachers for various specific areas including ESL and special education. Often this means that teachers are being asked to take classes outside of their area of expertise and training.

The Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teaching dealt with the complex question of teacher supply and acknowledged the particular issues for staffing rural and remote schools:

The staffing of rural and remote schools continues to be a problem nation wide, particularly in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia. While there may be an excess of teachers in city locations, this does not guarantee they will be able or willing to move to rural and remote areas to take up teaching positions.... Witnesses describe how professional and personal isolation was a disincentive to country appointment....A special incentive program is needed to attract teachers to these areas and to retain them there.(243-245)

The AEU recognises that the MCEETYA has established a Teacher Recruitment Taskforce and welcomes this initiative however the AEU is concerned that efforts to 'promote' teaching will not have effect in rural and remote areas unless the key questions around personal and professional isolation in these areas is also addressed.

Conditions of employment

It is important that the conditions of employment applicable to all teachers working in remote localities be recognised through the establishment of a remote teaching service award. The standards set in such an award must compensate for the costs associated with living and teaching in rural/remote communities and the need to provide additional incentives to work in these locations.

Such costs to be compensated for include but are not limited to:

- the higher costs of everyday expenses including food, clothing, gas, electricity, water, telephone and access to professional services (legal medical etc);
- higher rental and housing costs generally;
- transport costs both for goods and services and also to travel away from and to these localities;
- increased costs associated with pursuing areas of interest that may or may not be connected directly with work including study, sporting activities, hobbies etc.

In addition there are a number of factors not as directly related to cost and expenditure which make teaching in rural and remote localities less attractive. These factors include:

- Family dislocation and the potential costs with maintaining two households.
- Lack of opportunities to access personal and professional development which not only hinders the development of quality teaching staff but which also restricts promotional opportunities.
- Professional isolation which limits abilities to network and limits exposure to cutting edge and developmental curriculum which has the same impact as those outlined in the point above.
- Public scrutiny of professional/personal life within the confined settings of smaller localities.

There must therefore be recognition through salary and conditions of employment to compensate for these factors. To date whilst education systems at state and territory level have acknowledged this to a certain extent by putting in place remote teacher incentives, it is widely acknowledged that these packages do not go far enough to mitigate against these impediments. Further it is the AEU's experience that negotiations to improve these packages are often protracted and bitter, further detracting from the morale of teachers working in these localities.

Career Pathways

There is a need to establish career pathways which recognise and value the experience of teachers and allied staff working in rural and remote communities. The AEU supports merit selection procedures. However the impact of circumstances in rural and remote teaching should be taken into account in these procedures. For example merit based selection often incorporates criteria associated with access to professional development and exposure to new ideas/technologies and networks which are metropolitan based. The fact that it is often impossible for teachers in rural and remote areas to access this professional development or new opportunities means that there is a potential for merit selection criteria to be indirectly discriminatory.

Career pathways and the retention of quality staff will also be assisted through ensuring that employment security is available. Increased casualisation of the teaching workforce is an additional factor recognised as negatively impacting on the retention of staff.

Professional Development

There is a desperate need for systems to make additional funds available to support reasonable access to professional development for teachers in rural and remote communities. This is both a strategy to attract and retain experienced people to these areas and a mechanism to ensure that students get the best quality education. Funding must take into account not only the cost of professional development but also the additional costs associated with travel and or technology to access this development. In addition systems should provide funding and support structures to allow for the establishment of regional networks within which teachers working in similar circumstances can work collaboratively on curriculum issues, professional development and innovative practices.

Selection and Induction

The majority of teacher placements in rural and remote communities are new graduates, with a high proportion of these being young women. Sending new graduates to rural and remote communities continues then it is of critical importance that systems adopt comprehensive induction programs. These programs must:

- be systematically organised;
- explore the realities of life including environmental and cultural aspects;
- be linked to mentoring and networking programs facilitating contact with more experienced teachers;
- involve follow up and evaluation;
- include the establishment of professional support networks and access to professional development;
- include a component of pre-service preparation such as an internship or placement in rural and remote communities as part of teacher training.

Particular concerns of women in rural and remote communities

Approximately 70 per cent of the teaching workforce are women. As already discussed a large proportion of the new graduates working in rural and remote locations are women. There are some specific matters which the AEU would like to draw to the attention of the Inquiry with respect to women working in rural and remote communities. Our members have identified a number of factors which negatively impact on their willingness to stay working within these school environments. These factors (in addition to those outlined above) include:

- fears about safety and security - at school and at home;
- limited accommodation choices;
- lack of access to childcare services;
- negative and or hostile attitudes to women in leadership positions.

In addition for many women educators the isolation that accompanies teaching in rural and remote communities has meant that they are unwilling to choose this option when they are considering becoming pregnant. This not only denies the children in these communities from access to their skills and experience, it also disadvantages many women where country service has historically been a requirement to access further promotional opportunities. These matters were raised in the AEU's submission to the recent HREOC Inquiry into Pregnancy and Work. An excerpt from this submission includes the following contribution from one of the union's members:

“Given it (pregnancy) is something I am considering in the future I am wondering what issues I will face should I remain in a rural area. Some of my muddled thoughts include; I wonder if the small school setting actually placed additional pressure on the pregnant teacher/educator given there are fewer people to offload responsibilities onto. I can imagine that teachers in this position would be mindful of meeting the community and Departmental expectations, perhaps at the cost of their own health. What about those communities that are a distance away from health/medical support. Would teachers in this place be disadvantaged by not feeling as though they can take time to travel to main centres for doctors appointments and pre/post natal workshops? Accommodation is sometimes limited in small communities eg silver bullets/caravans. These would hardly be comfortable for a family. Also, access to childcare to enable the women to continue working.”

Any affirmative strategies to improve the retention of quality teachers in rural and remote locations must therefore take into account the particular concerns and experiences of women teachers.

Recommendations:

5. Wherever possible governments should ensure that students are able to attend a public education facility. If distances creates difficulties, governments should provide funds for transportation, technology and or the provision of government boarding schools as close as possible to the place of residence.
6. State/territory governments should be required and, in the short term, to put in place simple strategies such as the provision of carpets for classrooms which will have an immediate impact on improving the learning capacity of Indigenous students with

hearing difficulties. In the longer term appropriate design options for schools in remote communities should be developed in conjunction with these local communities.

7. Improving the sub standard nature of housing for teachers in rural and remote communities should be a priority of all state/territory governments.
8. State and Territory systems should establish rural and remote information technology strategies which focus on sustaining the development and use of information technology through proper installation of all hardware and software, provision of staff training and development in it's use (where possible on site) and funding for comprehensive maintenance programs.
9. There is an immediate need to address the problem of supply shortages of qualified teachers for rural and remote schools. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should be encouraged to meet with representatives from teacher unions to develop strategies to address this crisis. These strategies should include, but not be limited to:
 - the development and funding of a remote teaching service award which contains provisions to compensate for the real costs of living in these communities and provide incentives to retain qualified staff here;
 - the development of professional development programs for teachers in rural and remote communities, including the allocation of funds to sustain such programs;
 - the development of induction programs which ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to take up their teaching position in rural and remote communities.
 - Measures to address the particular concerns of women teachers in order to encourage them to continue employment in these localities including: facilitating access to appropriate pre and post natal care for pregnant women; the provision of greater support services and improved entitlements for employees in rural and remote communities who become pregnant; facilitating access to affordable, good quality childcare; developing strategies to overcome fears about personal safety and security; developing community based programs that are designed to promote the positives of having women in leadership positions to these communities.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

The parlous state of indigenous education is well documented. What is needed now is urgent attention to turn words into action.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The following Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child can be considered particularly relevant to Indigenous students:

Articles 23-24 relating to health issues;
Articles 28-29 relating to education issues;
Articles 3-40 relating to juvenile justice

Outcomes in Indigenous Education

It is well accepted that the outcomes for Indigenous students are extremely poor in comparison to the Australian population as a whole.

McCollow (1999) summarises the current parlous state of Indigenous education:

The facts are:

Overall attendance at school is less regular among Indigenous students than other students. Overall year-round attendance is less than 70 per cent among Indigenous students.

In some remote community schools in Queensland non-attendance has been reported as the single greatest obstacle to achievement by Indigenous students.

In the *National School English Literacy Survey* conducted in 1996 by the Australian Council for Educational Research, Indigenous students had average levels of English literacy achievement which were 3 to 4 years below other students tested. In this regard, it is worth noting that nearly 17 per cent of Indigenous students nationally “most often” speak a language other than English in their homes.

In the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study*, Indigenous primary and secondary students scored an average “significantly lower” than non-Indigenous students.

Results from state literacy and numeracy tests in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland *all* point to literacy and numeracy outcomes for Indigenous students which are below those for non-Indigenous students. Worse, in relation to these test outcomes the gap between Indigenous student outcomes and non-Indigenous student outcomes widens as students grow older.

The retention rate for Indigenous students to Year 12 in 1997 was 30.9 per cent compared with an overall student retention rate of 72.8 per cent — that is to say, the Indigenous retention rate is significantly less than half the rate for students generally.

According to the National Report on Schooling “a significant number of Indigenous students do not complete the compulsory years of schooling”. The apparent retention rate for Indigenous students to year 10 is 80.6 per cent compared with an apparent retention rate to Year 10 for non-Indigenous students of 97.6 per cent.

A much lower proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students who do complete Year 12 achieve academic results which qualify them for higher education.

These data on Indigenous education are, of course, related to the wider social disadvantages (such as poverty and ill-health) faced by Indigenous Australians. It is worth noting, for example, that -

- The unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians is 38 per cent compared with 8.7 per cent for the general population.
- The average income of Indigenous Australians is 65 per cent of that of the general population.
- The instance of infectious diseases in Indigenous communities is 12 times the Australian average — these include maladies such as middle ear infection which have a directly negative effect on the ability to function in a classroom.
- The death rate for Aboriginal children is 3-5 times higher than for other children.
- Indigenous families are 20 times more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous families.
- In 1995 there were 120 Aboriginal communities with poor water supplies, 134 with no sewerage and 250 without electricity.

At its April, 1999 meeting MCEETYA acknowledged the unsatisfactory nature of these outcomes, and committed itself to a number of targets to improve them. Whilst the AEU welcomes such a commitment, the setting of targets will not of itself solve the problem. However, they will be useful if they are a set in a context which leads to the implementation of the measures which is it known are necessary to create improvement. Such measure are addressed here.

Funding

McCollow goes on to consider funding:

The funding that is ear marked specifically for Indigenous education by governments isn't really very much. Funding for the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) constitutes less than 2.5 per cent of schools expenditure in the

current Commonwealth Budget. Interestingly, 41 per cent of these IESIP funds (rising to 49 per cent by 2002-03) go to non-government schools which educate only 12 per cent of Indigenous students.

Looking at expenditure at the State level, in the *National Report on Schooling 1997*, the Queensland Government identified \$17.7m in funding (Commonwealth and State) which was specifically targeted for Indigenous education. To put this in perspective, in that year this amount represented .8 of a per cent of the total government schools budget.

Recent proposed changes by the Commonwealth Government to ABSTUDY could result in a cut of more than \$18m in the Abstudy budget disadvantaging the majority of ABSTUDY recipients according to a report from Deakin University commissioned by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Reports and Recommendations

In its submission to the Senate Inquiry into Indigenous education “Talk the Talk ... now ... Walk the Walk” the AEU emphasised that there have been numerous reports with significant recommendations over the past two decades. The following are listed (pp. 5-6):

- Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988).
- The Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991); and
- The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (1995).
- Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs (1985).
- Justice Under Scrutiny :Report of the Inquiry into the Implementation by Governments of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1994).
- Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP 1990 and 1991) AESIP Implementation Report to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (1992).
- Bringing them Home: A guide to the findings and recommendations of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families (1997).
- A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: 1996-2002 .
- ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's Employment, A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (1998).

- Building Pathways: School-Industry Work Placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Students (1998).
- New Apprenticeships and Traineeship Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. (1997).
- Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP 1990, 1991 and 1992).
- National Review of Education for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1995).
- Culture Matters (199(?)).

Since then, further research has been conducted which this Inquiry may find useful:

- “Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory: “Collins Report”, Northern Territory Department of Education 1999
- “Indigenous Retention rates to Year 12: an evidence based analysis: A discussion paper prepared for the meeting of the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.” Dr. Jerry Schwab, Research fellow at The Australian National University’s Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. 1999
- “Public Expenditure on Services for Indigenous People: Education, Employment, Health and Housing: Discussion Paper No. 24”. September 1999, Max Neutze, Will Sanders, Giff Jones.

The Australian Education Union has cautiously welcomed the release of the "Collins Report" on Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. It is a timely contribution to the debate about Indigenous education and there can be no doubt that the NT Government must be brought to account for its appalling record in Indigenous education.

The report indicates some clear directions and we welcome a chance to discuss these with parents and teachers in these communities.

It is obvious that Indigenous students should have access to the same secondary and special education services as other NT students and a relief to see this need documented. It is similarly welcome to see recommendations about:

- increasing Indigenous employment;
- increased professional development for teachers;
- strategies to improve teacher retention;
- improvements to the amount and quality of housing in remote areas.

These are all issues that the AEU has campaigned about for many years and we can only hope that the NT and other Governments will heed Collins' advice.

However the AEU does have reservations about some of Mr Collins' recommendations at this stage. For example, his suggestion that staffing budgets should be managed at the school level

is one of the discredited ideas tried by the Kennett Government in Victoria. We don't want to go down that path in other jurisdictions.

We are also still very concerned that the fundamental principles of the bilingual program should be reinstated, and it is not clear at this stage whether Mr Collins' "two way" education policy will achieve this goal.

The Union will be respond in full to the report when we have had the opportunity to consider the detail and discuss it with our members but we are cautiously optimistic about its general direction. The critical question remains whether the government will do anything about involving all major stakeholders in the development of initiatives to address these findings.

The thrust of the recommendations in all of these reports is consistent and clear, and provides a sound basis for progress. The "Walk the Walk" submission does much to draw these recommendations together and we urge the HREOC Inquiry to consider this report as part of our submission.

Below we summarise the main directions which the AEU believes should be pursued in order to improve the situation for Indigenous peoples and the outcomes shown above.

Access

McCollow points out:

The responsibility for addressing the needs of Indigenous students falls very heavily on the government schooling sector:

- Nationally 87.7 per cent of Indigenous students attend government schools — that is to say, almost 90 per cent of Indigenous students *depend* on government schools to deliver educational services. This compares with a government school enrolment share for the general population of 70.3 per cent.
- A high proportion of Indigenous students are located in remote areas where government schools are likely to be the only education facilities available. For example in the Northern Territory nearly 80 per cent of Indigenous students are classified as attending remote schools, in Western Australia 54 per cent of Indigenous students attend remote schools. In South Australia 40 per cent of Indigenous students attend remote schools. In comparison, Queensland and New South Wales have a lower proportion of Indigenous students attending remote schools (26 per cent and 23 per cent respectively) but these figures are still well above the corresponding proportions for the student population generally.

The points noted above in the section on the importance of Public education are even more pressing in relation to the education of these Indigenous students in remote areas. Indigenous students would be further disadvantaged by the fragmentation of schooling under the mistaken notion that "choice", as proposed by the Federal government and private school lobbies, would add to their options. It would, in practice, make many of their schools less viable and less cohesive, and make it even more difficult to offer Indigenous students physical structures and appropriate curriculum through to the end of schooling

What is needed is a concerted effort to ensure that access to viable schools and curriculum options are available through to the end of secondary schooling. Where practicable this should involve physical buildings, situated in existing communities. In some instances this may not be possible, in some cases it may only be possible with limited curriculum offerings. In these circumstances open learning technology should be utilised to ensure that all Indigenous students can attend school and have an appropriate range of accredited course offerings.

Currently there has been a focus on attendance problems amongst Indigenous students. The AEU accepts that those not in school cannot be taught. However, it is important that this poor attendance be recognised as a symptom rather than a problem in itself. It is in large part caused by the failure of schools and school systems to cater to the special needs and cultural diversity of Indigenous students. It is important that in addressing absence, the necessary adjustments are made to take note of cultural requirements and the need to engage all students, and that “truancy” is dealt with in a punitive manner which “blames the victim”. Little will be served by coercing students into schools that are not adapting to meet their needs.

Similarly, there is emerging evidence that Indigenous students are over represented amongst the growing numbers of students being excluded and expelled from schools. This must be a cause for great concern. It underlines the need for culturally appropriate responses within schools and better resourcing to deal with the issues.

The problems of Indigenous students are compound and must be addressed through a suite of measures starting with more early childhood education, greater early intervention programs and behavioural management and student support programs aimed at maximising participation in schooling.

Parent and Community Participation

The AEU endorses and strongly supports the many recommendations in the Reports above which emphasise the importance of involving the community and of introducing self-determination into educational decision making in Indigenous communities. These are summarised in “Walk the Walk”. The Recommendations of the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples(pp22-23) and the section on “Consultation with Local Communities” (pp.36-38) are both relevant here.

Communities must be supported through programs such as Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA) which aim to involve parents of Indigenous students in decisions that affect their children’s schooling.

Culturally Appropriate Curriculum and Pedagogy

The importance of Indigenous cultures and the need to inter-weave these into education and training are another common element of the reports. This is summarised in “Walk the Walk’ (pp.13- 15).

It is also imperative that appropriate curriculum is developed in order to maximise participation and that pedagogy be developed which takes account of differing learning styles and cultures. There are a number of reports and papers which have taken this view and outlined excellent strategies to achieve outcomes. These are again summarised in “Walk the Walk”, (pp.18-21).

Similarly, the importance of language, history and culture must be supported. For those for whom English is not the first language, the right for communities to choose to have bi-lingual programs of schooling is both a moral and educational imperative.

Recognition that in some circumstances English should be taught as a second language, with specialist ESL teachers, is also important.

Staffing

There is a need for a dramatic increase in the number of Indigenous teachers employed in Australian schools.

As well as classroom teachers, trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are required urgently in educational administration and in consultative roles at regional/state/territory and national levels.

Schools in Indigenous Communities

It is highly desirable that schools in Indigenous communities have on their staff Indigenous teachers who are from that community. The AEU would support special programs of recruitment and replacement which facilitated this occurring.

The AEU believes that in self-managed Indigenous community schools, Education Department/Ministries should negotiate with the community regarding selection of teachers.

Schools with Substantial Indigenous Enrolments

It is also desirable that schools with substantial Indigenous enrolments have Indigenous teachers within the school. Such teachers should be part of the general staffing, although they may have particular responsibility for the pastoral care of Indigenous students. However, there is an obligation on the administration of the school to ensure that this does not result in unfair workloads.

Other Schools

In schools with low enrolments of Indigenous students, these students still have a right to be taught by teachers able to teach in a culturally appropriate manner.

Recruitment and training

In order to meet the above, there are considerable implications for the recruitment and training of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers.

Indigenous Teachers

A comprehensive approach to the training of Indigenous teachers is necessary. The AEU advocates that:

- A national employment strategy be implemented to give priority placement to Indigenous teacher graduates.
- Selection of Indigenous persons for training must be made from as wide a field as possible and training programmes must be flexible in entrance requirements.
- A diverse approach to the training of Indigenous teachers is needed. Enclaves should be provided to support students undertaking teacher education in existing tertiary institutions. Off campus programmes should be developed to enable Indigenous peoples to train as teachers in their community/homeland area.
- Every effort should be made by teacher education institutions to employ suitable Indigenous staff.
- Specialist staff development programmes for teacher educators should be implemented to prepare them for working with Indigenous teacher education students.
- The AEU supports the establishment of affirmative action programmes with opportunities for career development, work shadowing, and opportunities to act in higher positions being put in place in all Education Departments and Ministries for Indigenous peoples.

Non-Indigenous Teachers

The AEU recommends that :

Teacher education for all non-indigenous teachers preparing to teach in Australian schools should include: the history and cultures of Indigenous peoples, as well as relevant contemporary issues; material on successful teaching strategies that have been developed in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context; practice teaching in schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments.

Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs)

The AEU notes and supports Recommendation 297 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in custody:

That

- (a) The vital role which Aboriginal Education Workers - or persons performing a similar role but with another title - can play in ensuring effective Aboriginal participation in the education system be recognised;
- (b) Aboriginal Education Workers be given the recognition and remuneration which their role merits and that it be recognised that they suffer from conflicting expectations of community and Department as to their role; and

- (c) It be understood that there is a need for them to have accountability to the Aboriginal Community as well as to their employer.

In the absence of sufficient Indigenous teachers, AIEW's will continue to play a vital role in bridging the cultural gap between Indigenous students and Non-Indigenous teachers, and in the developemnt of appropriate curriculum. In view of the importance of this role, the AEU strongly recommends that MCEETYA move immediately to implement all the outstanding recommendations of the Ara Kuwaritjaktu Project (1995).

In particular, the precarious nature of the employment of many AIEWs should be addressed. Poor working conditions, low status, lack of recognition of skills, low salaries, racism, exploitation, lack of career paths/structures and limited access to professional development and further education and training are all matters in need of urgent attention if the high turnover of these extremely valuable people is to be stemmed.

Recommendations

The material above and the reports referred to implicitly suggest a wide range of recommendations. Rather than list them all, we urge the Commission to consider the above material and the submission to the Senate ("Walk the Walk".) However, the following four recommendations are suggested as a summary of what is needed in an approach to Indigenous education:

10. That all future Commonwealth, state and territory policies and strategies be developed and delivered in a context that recognises, and takes full account of, the cultural history, identity, diversity and ongoing educational disadvantage of Indigenous peoples.
11. That the focus of all future education and training for Indigenous peoples be on the consolidation and implementation of the many excellent initiatives outlined in reports over the 10 year period covered by the Inquiry.
12. That a coordinated consultative national approach be adopted to ensure that culturally appropriate best practice informs all Indigenous education and training needs. Further that to ensure certainty, consistency and cultural appropriateness in the delivery of education and training to Indigenous people, a National Indigenous Advisory Body inclusive of all Indigenous education stakeholders and with representation from all States and Territories be established as the primary advisory body on all education and training matters.
13. That in order to fulfill the commitment made at the April 1999 meeting, MCEETYA initiate a process of consultation with Indigenous education groups and other interested parties to develop a strategy for the implementation of measures in line with recommendations in the various reports which will facilitate meeting its targets.

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