

ACT Budget Submission 2006-2007

Australian Education Union – ACT Branch

VALUING THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE ACT

Our public education system is the best education system in Australia, delivering student outcomes as measured by international tests such as the Program for International Student Assessment [PISA] and the Trends in International Maths and Science Study [TIMSS] among the best in the world.

The ACT Government 2000-2005 has made significant steps in supporting the public education system in the ACT. These include lowering Kindergarten to Year 3 classes in primary schools to cluster around 21 students, and negotiating arrangements in 2002 and 2004 Certified Agreements in schools and CIT that improved the competitiveness of our public education system and its capacity to attract and retain quality staff.

These changes have been locally initiated as has the major change facing the school system over the next three years, the implementation of a new P-10 Curriculum framework. While student outcomes remain consistently among the best in the OECD as demonstrated by PISA and TIMMS, it is recognised by every teacher and principal and every school community that there is always room for improvement.

Some general improvement in the physical infrastructure has been made, and will continue if the infrastructure proposal on the table for West Belconnen is implemented.

Because of these improvements, the public education system has sustained a level of funding improvement in percentage terms since 2000 that approximates to the increase achieved by ACT private schools from the indexation provided by the Commonwealth Government. This is significantly better than the increases of CPI (or less) which were available under the previous ACT Governments.

The improvements made have gone some way to addressing the general neglect of public education at the hands of previous ACT administrations. However, the ACT system faces a problematic future if this process of gradual improvement in support is not continued.

At 59.9% of students attending ACT public schools and with a decline in 2003 of some 0.9% [one of the record declines in the country], public confidence in ACT public schools continues to be a matter of debate.

Since 2000 substantial efforts have been made to improve the professional capacity of the system's teaching workforce. These include improved levels of professional learning, beginning teacher support, improvements in evaluation of teacher and school performance, and the introduction of new technology such as interactive whiteboards.

The ACT public education system is not standing still. The Curriculum Review, the Review of ACT Secondary Colleges, and the work currently being undertaken to develop an ACT system of professional registration are examples of the future orientation of the system and the expectations of the profession by the community and the employer.

The last five years have seen progress both in terms of recognising the work of teachers and improving outcomes for students.

This local progress has been in the face of a deliberate campaign of bias in favour of private education by the Federal Government. The funding bias of the Federal Government is well-known. In addition, the Federal Government has deliberately denigrated public education. Its assaults on "standards" [particularly literacy and numeracy], "values" and the most recent attacks on critical literacies and outcomes based education are but some examples of the

hostility of Federal Ministers towards our public education systems.

During 2005, the Federal Government has demonstrated that it is prepared to use its funding leverage with the States and Territories to drive its educational, industrial and political agenda to the detriment of the public education systems' students and the teaching profession. The Federal Government's control of the Senate means that there are no effective checks on the power of the Federal Government to impose its agenda, or on the Federal Minister Brendan Nelson's increasingly erratic and ad hoc ideas. The profession and State and Territory systems have got used to multi million dollar incentives being announced without consultation, planning or regard to the impact on existing schools and TAFE institutions. The Australian Technical Colleges, the proposed national Year 12 Certificate and the \$1billion infrastructure grants to parent associations are but three examples of populist ideology overriding good public policy and practice.

In this context, the ACT Government needs to reach an agreement with the teaching profession in the Certified Agreement process that continues the pathway of continuous improvement, of reward and recognition, of support and flexibility that underpinned the 2004 Agreements in both schools and CIT.

The key to the next Agreement has to be the recognition that professional teaching salaries in the ACT must remain competitive to our colleagues interstate and in the private sector.

Recent salary settlements in the public sector in Queensland at 4%pa [now including teachers], and in NSW public sector at 4%pa [including teachers], provide a benchmark to sustain competitiveness. The recent settlement in South Australia saw teachers achieving 5.5% in the first year of their new Agreement. It should be noted that the 2004 Agreement in the ACT for public school teachers saw a 17% increase in applications to join the teaching profession in the ACT public sector following the settlement reached at that time. In NSW the Independent sector, which significantly influences outcomes in private schools in the ACT, has also achieved a 4%pa settlement.

The ACT school system and CIT face very large numbers of retirees from their workforces over the next three years. Problems relating to loss of expertise at all levels of the service exist now, and will be exacerbated unless we can not only recruit beginning teachers out of the training institutions, but also entice experienced staff from other systems and from other careers.

The issue of retention of existing staff is also significant. This can be alleviated in part by improved flexibility in the superannuation arrangements that are available to employees. This would allow employees to stay past 55 but access the pension benefit that they would have received had they left at 54 years 11 months [for CSS members]. Similar flexibility needs to be available for members of other superannuation schemes.

The major method of retaining quality staff has to be through the recognition and reward of Accomplished Teaching. Since the incorporation of the Advanced Skills Teacher classification into the incremental salary scale in 1996, the ACT school system has not had mechanisms for rewarding high levels of professional performance other than those that see teachers gradually promoted out of the classroom. The previous scheme of Master Teacher met a similar fate. These mechanisms do exist in other States and Territories and in CIT.

Attempts to reward higher levels of performance such as the Leading Teacher classification have been diminished by the refusal of most schools to use their funds to pay teachers at that level from their own resources, believing such Accomplished Teaching mechanisms should be systemically driven.

Methods of reward and recognition employed highlight the absurdity of not rewarding high level classroom teaching, eg recognition of other work experience to determine starting salary, incremental advancement for additional qualifications but not at the top of the scale. It is particularly important that the ACT Government reaches agreement with the profession on methods of rewarding individual Accomplished Teaching before the Federal Government

imposes its own performance pay mechanisms as another exercise in funding blackmail.

In developing new reward and recognition systems alongside a system of professional registration, the ACT will be better able to respond to the positive aspects of the Standards agenda being developed at the national level through NIQTSL.

Just as in 2004, the ACT Government has to recognise that the arguments for sustaining competitive salaries and conditions is the key to a quality high performing teaching workforce. The recent outcomes in NSW and Queensland have underpinned the need recognised by these State Governments to invest in their education workforce. The Agreements achieved in NSW are historic in that they were achieved by negotiation, were fully funded and without the conflict that has traditionally been a part of wages settlements in NSW.

The overall 4% pa funding package in NSW is configured to give differential salary outcomes at different levels. We would wish to craft arrangements in the ACT to give the flexibility to reinforce the comparability and competitiveness of our teaching classifications, but in a manner that meets the need for an Accomplished Teaching classification to recognise higher levels of performance.

The ACT community's expectations of its public education workforce have never been greater. Over the next three years the ACT's teachers will need to invest further in their expertise to meet and exceed those expectations, and the challenges of changing curriculum, pedagogy and student needs. This will be in a climate of continuing hostility from the Federal Government towards public education and the profession. A three year fully funded Agreement that maintains and reinforces the competitiveness of our system as it seeks to attract, retain and reward quality teaching is essential.

It must also be achieved expeditiously to ensure that the negative impact of the Howard/Nelson industrial, educational and funding changes have as little impact on the ACT profession and student outcomes as possible.

In light of these circumstances, the AEU presents a streamlined Budget submission this year, focusing on those areas where our members have identified the highest need.

In particular we see great value in a number of the ALP's pre-election commitments, particularly the following, which we urge the government to support in the next Budget:

- Support for increased staffing to improve the level of pastoral care in high schools, through the proposed Student Support Program
- Renewal in the college sector (to which the government has already shown its commitment)
- The establishment of the Strategic VET Unit at CIT which was promised in the ALP's pre-election policy.

In addition a number of specific issues have arisen from our membership during the course of the year which require additional funding from government. These are outlined below.

Interagency Collaboration

The Union has for many years argued that the provision of services to children and their families is most effectively done via models which have interagency collaboration at their core. A successful example of such a model is the Ngunnawal Early Childhood Centre model. The Union urges the government to make provision for extension of this model to other areas of Canberra, basing its location of future sites on a consideration of the existing school clusters.

Class Sizes

Special Education.

Class sizes in Learning Support Centres. These centres, which are attached to schools, have experienced a growth in maximum class sizes over the last 10 years leading to current class maximum sizes of 14 in Primary and 16 in Secondary. A recent motion of AEU Branch Council set AEU policy on class sizes for these settings back to the numbers previously

allowed. AEU policy on class sizes now seeks DET funding to allow for 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 8 students in Learning Support Centres (Primary) and 1 teacher and 1 special teacher's assistant to every 10 students in Learning Support Centres (Secondary.)

Class size reductions in special education have not kept pace with the reduction to class sizes in early childhood, in fact class sizes in special education in those years have risen whilst mainstream class sizes have fallen. This has resulted in situations where numbers of Kindergarten – Year 3 students in LSC classes in some schools approach those of mainstream classes at the same level in the same school.

Languages other than English (LOTE)

In senior secondary colleges, LOTE classes are typically composite classes, involving multilevels of courses and units being taught in the same classroom. It is not unusual in some languages to have a teacher expected to deal with Yr 11 and Yr 12 students undertaking Beginning and Continuing courses involving a range of different modules in the one class at the same time. The workload for teachers and the stress placed upon students is obvious. If the community wished to have young Australians furnished with the opportunity to seriously study a language, class sizes must be reconsidered.

Preschool support

Special Needs students

Preschool members are concerned about the level of resources available to support students with special needs. Despite the reduction in size of other early childhood classes, preschool classes continue to contain 25 children. The union believes there should be a review of mainstream preschool class size where a class contains special needs integrated students. There is also a need for more access to support for behaviour management in preschools, and emergency support for same.

Increased numbers of School Leader positions

The current structure of a single Principal for Preschools, supported by four FTE School Leader C positions does not reflect the size and complexity of the preschool sector. In the absence of any Deputy Principal (School Leader B) positions, there is no career structure available for specialists in Early Childhood Education to progress through to the Principal level.

Each full time Executive Officer in the revised structure has about 50 staff (teachers and assistants) to supervise, on a large number of sites. With the inclusion of Preschool Services under Education, the disparity between the supervisory roles and workload of the Executive Officers in preschools and their schools colleagues at the same level has become very apparent. We believe that there should be a Deputy Principal for each of the school districts (Central, North and South) to assist Executive Officers and free them up to spend more time on the ground in preschools. In addition, the large number of part time sites in Central district requires the provision of an Executive Teacher (School Leader C) to assist the Executive Officer in that district.

Counsellors in preschools

The current provision 3 part time (less than 2 days per week in each instance) Counsellors to cover all preschool sites is insufficient. Each Counsellor covers between 25-29 sites. Their work is principally that of assessment of special education and special needs children and is an important link in the placement process of children into primary school. Further provision needs to be made to make the role of such Counsellors effective, and the workload manageable.

Funding for full implementation of the Curriculum Renewal project.

Whilst funding has been committed for a 4 year agenda for curriculum renewal and implementation, it is clear that for full and successful implementation additional monies will need to be committed over a longer period of time. The cycle for refining and implementing the Principles and Framework, once finalised, is expected to be at least 3 years, in line with the School Development Review cycle.

There is a significant need for the provision of support materials and support PD for school leaders and all classroom teachers, to enable meaningful implementation of the new Framework. Without this commitment to long term resourcing for implementation at the ground level, the project risks becoming another paper product rather than returning real value to students and parents.

English as a Second language Funding

The profile of migrant students in our schools and colleges has changed dramatically in recent years. A high proportion of immigrants are now from the Sudan and Somali; their literacy requirements are far in excess of previous migrant populations catered for in our schools. Their needs are more expensive in terms of time and resourcing to meet. Despite this intensification of need, ESL funding for schools continues to fall as the overall population in public schools falls. Schools increasingly have more to do, with fewer resources.

It is time to address the basis on which funding for ESL is provided. ESL funding needs to be needs based, reflecting the actual migrant student numbers and needs present in our schools. A model for this can be found in the Student Appraisal system operating in recent years for students with a disability.

Occupational Health and Safety

Current OH&S training appears to be concentrated in the School Leader ranks. Some of the Designated Work Group Health and Safety Representatives and Deputies are untrained. It is not sufficient or appropriate to train a school's leaders in OH&S and leave OH&S reps, in particular, untrained. It is important that all teachers are trained to some degree in OH&S principles as they have duty of care for numbers of students. In particular, future training is sought in these areas:

- Training for all teachers, staff and managers on the new Guidelines against Bullying in the ACT Government Service to encourage implementation
- Risk assessment and risk management training for principals and deputies in anticipation of the trial in 2006
- Emergency Procedures training for all staff
- Manual handling for all staff
- Psychological injury prevention for all staff.

Canberra Institute of Technology

- **Funding to create a model to allow for teacher transfer between TAFE and schools. This model to include arrangements re teachers' qualifications.**

Given the possibility of future same-site partnerships between the schools sector and TAFE, it's imperative that the barriers to teachers working across public education sectors be addressed. The ACT's Vocational Education and Training system provides pathways through the various sectors of public education (high schools, colleges and the CIT) enabling participants to continue through a chosen path of study as they move between the sectors. The effectiveness of the system would be enhanced by an analysis of the barriers that exist between the sectors with regard to the movement of VET teachers. The AEU is seeking a study into the mobility between the schools and TAFE sectors, and the recommendation of a model to deal in a streamlined manner with teacher transfer between those sectors.

- **Fee relief for secondary students to undertake VET study at CIT whilst completing Yr 10 or Yr 12 qualifications within a school setting.**

The current model which enables College students to access courses at CIT is being hampered because of the costs associated with payments to CIT from the individual schools. Smaller colleges cannot afford to pay CIT student fees for a single student. In most cases this provision of an outside course does not "save" the college any tuition fees, as the numbers of students accessing CIT through this process do not impact on college class sizes or elective provision. Some form of centralised payment to CIT should be devised on behalf of colleges, to allow for fee relief to students and their schools.

- **The CIT must remain accessible to all members of the Canberra community.**

We note the Government's commitment to abolishing fees for Yr 12 students at CIT, and the enhanced commitment to TPV holders. Future Budgets must ensure expanded provision of an appropriate range of fee exempt courses in CIT for disadvantaged members of the community such as the unemployed, young people at risk, women wanting to return to the workforce, people with little education, those with very poor literacy and language skills, people with a disability and people from low income families who wish to increase their education in order to improve their life situation.

- **Establishment of a New Apprenticeship Ombudsman in the ACT**

At present a trainee or apprentice that encounters difficulty during their training or has a bad experience in the workplace has few options. They can choose to persevere and risk establishing a negative perception of that chosen industry sector only to leave that industry once their training is completed or they can withdraw immediately. Whilst it is true that the trainees can change their choice of provider during his program this is an option rarely exercised. The opportunity to raise their concerns is limited. Further the capacity and willingness of stakeholders in the system to pursue those concerns has proven to be equally restricted.

The establishment of a neutral party to investigate and, where appropriate, take action around a trainee's or apprentice's experience would go a long way to lift the integrity of the system within the ACT and go towards lowering the cancellations and withdrawal rate among ACT trainees and apprentices.

CLIVE HAGGAR
Branch Secretary
Australian Education Union – ACT Branch