



**Australian Education Union Submission to the
ACT Tertiary Education Taskforce
Creating a Connected ACT Tertiary Education Environment**

The Australian Education Union - ACT Branch (AEU) is the peak professional and industrial organisation for over 3000 principals, teachers and school support staff in ACT public schools and TAFE colleges. This membership represents the vast majority of principals and teachers and an increasing membership base of school assistants, Indigenous Education Officers/Workers, Youth Workers and others who support students in public schools.

The AEU welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Tertiary Education Taskforce. In this submission the AEU intends to provide advice on professional and industrial considerations for public schools and TAFE colleges in relation to proposed changes to the ACT tertiary education environment. This submission will address the proposals using the following sub-headings:

- Information, Communication and Planning
- Students and their Curriculum Needs
- Class Sizes
- Careers Counselling
- Keeping Students in Education/Training and Supporting Disengaged Youth
- Equity and Diversity
- The Education and Training Workforce
- Parents and Community
- High Quality VET Provision in the ACT

The AEU upholds the following principles which have shaped this submission:

- Every child and young person can learn
- Every student has the right to a high quality education
- it is a fundamental responsibility of governments to adequately resource public schools and TAFE colleges to ensure that education is of high quality
- education systems and schools must meet the diverse needs of children and young people in the 21st Century
- the longer students remain in education and/or training, the better their opportunities in life

The AEU provides the following documents as attachments:

1. *AEU Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into Combining Schools and Work: Supporting Successful Transitions* (January 2009).
2. *AEU Submission to the Productivity Commission Study into VET Workforce* (2010).
3. *AEU TAFE Survey* (2010).
4. *TAFE Funding and the Education Targets* by The Centre for the Economics of Education and Training for the AEU (2010).
5. *AEU TAFE Futures Report and Summary* (2006).

Information, Communication and Planning

The AEU recognises that the accessibility of key information to enable students to make informed decisions on the appropriate pathway is lacking. Improvements are required to the collection and updating of appropriate information and communication of that information. This will greatly benefit students, parents and education providers. The AEU supports a single portal of information as a constantly evolving system which includes maps of:

- The links between schools, colleges, VET in schools, TAFE/RTO programs, university, government agencies and community services (including careers advice, mental health services, mentoring agencies, drug and alcohol support, carer support, charities).
- VET in schools programs and VET course provision across ACT.
- all education provider timetables

The AEU supports *in principle* the tracking of students through high school and college to better understand the pathway of each student and to prevent their disengagement from education, training or employment. This tracking would also assist students who do become disengaged to be supported to re-engage. This tracking information must be protected by the appropriate privacy provisions and only be used to support students.

The AEU recommends the development of a strategic plan to optimise inter-agency collaboration and minimise duplication of services to children and young people. This strategic plan should consider whole-of-government plans relating to children and young people.

Supporting Students and meeting their Curriculum Needs

Students must be empowered for shape their own pathways for education, training and employment and they must be fully supported to achieve that pathway. One of the main ways to address the needs of students is to ensure they have equitable access to a broad, rich curriculum at every stage of education and training. The AEU supports holistic student development which covers all key learning areas and is in line with the ACT Curriculum Framework *Every Chance to Learn* and the Australian Curriculum, soon to be fully implemented in all schools. This supports students to develop a breadth of skills, knowledge, values and understandings that will serve them well throughout their lives. The AEU contends that once the diverse needs of students are met through a high quality curriculum and well-resourced public schools then the needs of employers and the economy will be met.

There are a significant number of intersecting issues which must be addressed in public schools and TAFE colleges if students are to have equitable access to a high quality curriculum.

Class Sizes

The AEU recommends that schools and college class sizes be capped to the following maximums, in accordance with the AEU-ACT Branch policy:

Preschool to Year 3	21
Years 4 - 12	25

VET in Schools classes frequently peak at 20 or more for many trades training programs. This limits the nature of training offered to students due to safety considerations as these high class sizes pose potentially moderate and high risk

situations. Teachers' duty of care considerations must be balanced with educational priorities. Additional VET in Schools teachers are required to reduce class sizes, maximise learning opportunities for students and provide industry and business with the skilled school-leavers they seek as employees.

The AEU notes that VET class sizes within CIT vary in relation to the nature of the class offerings and are determined through risk analysis processes. The maximum student numbers in high risk classes are generally:

- (a) 8 (or more) students in theory classes, and
- (b) generally less than 8 students in practical classes.

In addition to these parameters, 1 on 1 tutoring is also common in high risk situations. Class sizes in high and moderate risk situations are limited by direct line of sight limitations or other safety concerns. The AEU is concerned that there is constant pressure on CIT to increase class sizes as a result of the highly competitive VET environment.

Careers Counselling

Secondary students require improved access to careers counselling which should be formalised from Year 9 onwards. Currently, most secondary school careers counsellors receive a single line allowance (20% reduction in face to face teaching load) to provide this service to the entire student population at the school. The AEU advocates for careers counsellors who are appropriately trained and resourced to maintain appropriate links within the ACT community and with employers. They must also be provided with adequate time to identify and support structured workplace learning opportunities, ASBAs, traineeships and provide guidance for every student to engage in their education and/or training pathway.

It would be ideal to develop a comprehensive network of careers counsellors with strong links to industry, employers and tertiary institutions. Such a system was facilitated until late 2009 through the Student to Industry program (SIP) which provided these links for more than a decade. The Department of Education withdrew funding for this service in 2010 when the work was devolved to schools and teachers. DET established 1.5 FTE staffing positions (within the Careers, Transitions and Vocational Learning section) to support this devolution of responsibility.

Keeping Students in Education/Training and Supporting Disengaged Youth

The AEU recommends that significant resources be provided to expand the range of programs and settings in the public education system in order to meet the diverse needs of students, including disengaged young people. It is preferable that these programs be provided within a school or college setting but there may be a need to establish alternative programs in specialised educational or training environments. Such an initiative would help to reduce the number of students who become disengaged from schooling.

Reduction of further youth disengagement from existing schools may be achieved by the development of blended learning experiences including a mix of education, work experience and on-the-job skills attainment. Adoption of such innovative programs as the *Big Picture Schools* and the enhancement of Virtual Learning Environments are examples of a more flexible approach to education than traditional 'schooling'.

The unique needs of those students who must combine work and study should be accommodated so that such students are provided with every opportunity and support to maintain engagement in their education through to Year 12 and beyond.

Equity and Diversity

The AEU urges all those with an interest in the needs of students (and future employees) to ensure barriers to the equitable access to education, training and employment opportunities are addressed. Cultural and attitudinal barriers still remain amongst some educators, careers counsellors, industries and parents. For example there continues to be a distinction between academic and vocational courses within schools and colleges and the perceived value of each. Also, pervasive attitudes about 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' pathways for both boys and girls prevents them from diversifying and being supported in the appropriate choice for them, regardless of their gender.

Similarly industry and business must be supported to provide rewarding work-experience and employment options for young people with a disability.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be fully supported to achieve equivalent or better outcomes than non-Indigenous students. There are a number of successful programs in public schools which require expansion

Due to significant under-funding of ESL programs, students of English as a Second Language are not adequately supported to achieve a proficient level of English. In 2009, 52% of all ESL students in ACT public schools did not receive additional educational support to help them develop their English language skills. A significant number of teachers of ESL students do not have a TESOL qualification. The AEU congratulates DET on supporting teachers to obtain this qualification at the University of Canberra and recommends this continues for all teachers who need TESOL. There is also a lack of support and resources to assist ESL students to complete a bridging course in order to undertake a TAFE course.

Nationally, the TAFE system has a proud history of providing a high quality, accessible training 'safety net' for many students. However in recent years, successive Federal and State/Territory governments, together with peak industry groups, have accepted the concept of free market/privatisation of Vocational Education and Training. In Victoria and Tasmania the speed of privatisation has accelerated so that as of 2009 TAFE no longer existed in Tasmania. However, the AEU is pleased see that authorities are now reconsidering reinstating TAFE in Tasmania due to the failure of the polytechnic model. The Victorian TAFEs now contest with each other and private providers for every training dollar, resulting in student fees sky-rocketing and preventing many from accessing VET.

The ACT government has failed to increase the recurrent funding of CIT by the annual CPI for the last decade government funding for TAFE on a per-student-contact-hour basis has been cut by 22% since 1997. The AEU has continually called on the ACT government to increase recurrent funding for educational delivery at CIT.

The Education and Training Workforce

The recruitment and retention of enough qualified teachers into all areas of the profession, preschool to TAFE, is vital to sustaining a high quality public education system which meets the needs of all students.

The AEU identifies a range of issues which need addressing to ensure a sustainable teaching workforce into the future.

Over the last decade, teachers have experienced a significant increase in their workload, particularly in areas not directly related to teaching and learning. The AEU recommends that schools and TAFEs employ more administrative staff to complete these non-teaching duties (where appropriate) to enable teachers to focus on student learning and school leaders to concentrate on educational leadership. All teachers also require additional release time to complete teaching-related responsibilities, participate in high quality professional development and industry engagement, and time to collaborate with colleagues.

The AEU is aware there is a significant shortage of casual relief teachers right across the school sector from preschool to college. This is of great concern because teachers, particularly those who cover areas of shortage such as early childhood education, maths, science and languages, cannot be replaced when they are sick. This can result in their colleagues taking on extra teaching loads, classes being combined or learning programs being modified. The casual relief teacher shortage also has the flow-on effect of preventing teachers from participating in professional development and mentoring activities during core teaching hours. A significant amount of DET professional development is now planned for after-school hours, on weekends or in stand-down when these used to be run during school hours. This is unsustainable for all concerned and avoids resolving with the main problem which is to recruit enough high quality relief teachers with the right specialties to work in the ACT public school system.

Along with the shortage of casual relief teachers, there is also a shortage of appropriately qualified, permanent secondary teachers (including but not limited to mathematics and science teachers) and this is reportedly affecting the attainment levels of students. Attracting people into the profession to address the current shortage areas may be achieved through improved recruitment and retention strategies such as the development of closer links between the universities, DET and CIT to ensure education courses keep pace with the needs of students in the 21st century; promotion of the teaching profession as a rewarding and important job; and raising the status of teaching within the community.

VET teachers' workloads have recently been investigated in the DET VETiS Workload Report (2009) and have been found to be unsustainable. Contributors to these excessive workloads include the requirement for dual assessments, a lack of time and resources to complete workplace visits, and assessments or time to participate in return to industry opportunities.

There is a scarcity of VET in Schools (VETiS) teachers who have industry qualifications and an education degree. It is virtually impossible to find qualified relief teachers in many areas of VETiS. Hence, VET teachers cannot be released to participate in PD or to return to industry to maintain industry currency. In addition, VETiS teachers need to prepare for classes, order materials, teach, assess, clean up after classes etc. It is often physically impossible to complete these tasks while maintaining a full teaching load plus engage in other responsibilities (e.g. playground duty etc). Hence, potential VET teachers choose to not engage in VET as they recognise the workload is unsustainable. VET in Schools programs require a significant increase in resources and additional

qualified teachers to ensure high quality provision for students and a sustainable workforce.

The AEU is especially keen to ensure that VET teachers are appropriately trained and have access to continuous professional development. The Certificate IV TAA (Training and Assessment) and Certificate IV TAE (Training and Education) are significantly deficient in providing VET teachers with an understanding of educational pedagogy. The Certificate IV has been identified as a suitable entrance qualification for novice teachers who are under the guidance of an experienced educational mentor. The Certificate IV should be augmented throughout a teacher's career by appropriate further education through a Diploma, Advanced Diploma and eventually to a degree in education. VET teacher qualifications must require both on-the-job experience and pedagogical study which should focus on critical reflection of their educational delivery and assessment practices and address how to meet the needs of the diverse range of students. These teachers should be registered with the relevant teacher registration body which will have the responsibility of monitoring and maintaining the quality of teachers engaged in VET in both public and private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

The AEU continues to raise concerns about inadequate remuneration for teachers which is a deterrent to attracting and retaining the right people into the profession. For example, the salary for Deputy Principals in ACT public schools is 16% behind the equivalent school leader in New South Wales and the ACT experienced casual relief teacher rate is almost 12% behind the equivalent rate in NSW. Overall, the salaries for teachers are lower than those of other professions. Currently, if classroom teachers at the top of the scale wish to increase their salary, they need to take on Executive responsibilities and spend less or no time in the classroom. The AEU advocates for a professional pay structure which rewards teaching excellence based on agreed standards and enables these teachers to remain in the classroom.

The lower relative salaries for the teaching profession together with increased workload, challenging working conditions, low morale and perceived low status all combine to encourage teachers to leave the profession. If teachers were appropriately respected and recognised for the work they do; were held in the esteem they deserve, were rewarded with sustainable workloads and conditions, and were appropriately remunerated then there would be ample teachers in the profession.

Parents and Community

Research shows that parents have a significant influence on their child's choices in regard to their educational pathway and employment/career. Parents must be fully informed about all the options in order to support their child/ren with these choices and the mixture of educational experiences available. The single portal of information should be accessible to parents, students, teachers, careers counsellors, employers, education providers and other stakeholder.

Parents, educators, employers and young people themselves should be continually educated about the diverse options open to students in the 21st century and that boys and girls are no longer limited to 'traditional' options divided along gender lines or limited to academic versus vocational pathways. Advice about diverse choices should also consider that youth today will be working in jobs not yet created. All youth support services must consider this carefully to ensure education and training offer a broad and extensive curriculum to equip students well for an evolving world.

The provision of support services for children and young people must be fully integrated to ensure seamless and successful transitions through schooling, post-school options and into employment. The responsibility to support young people is a shared one, therefore student support services, career counselling, mentoring, the various government agencies, mental health services, drug and alcohol support services, carer support, charities etc must be connected.

High Quality VET Provision in the ACT

Educators and industry representatives alike recognise that the current 'risk management' approach employed by the ACT VET regulator Accreditation and Registration Council (ARC) does not adequately support the development and maintenance of a consistently high standard of VET provision. The AEU understands that ARC audits ACT VET providers to ensure compliance with Australian Quality Training Framework standards and the delivery of appropriate educational material. ARC does not currently monitor the skills attainment of VET graduates. Consequently, the AEU recommends that a moderation system be developed and appropriately resourced to enable an independent body to assess all aspects of VET provision against a set of agreed standards. Included in this assessment should be an examination of skills attainment of VET graduates against national skills standards. This process would support consistent, high quality VET provision in the ACT.

Accountability with regards to the expenditure of public funds is an important part of a high quality VET system in the ACT. Public education institutions adhere to clearly mandated public reporting responsibilities to ensure transparency and appropriate expenditure of public funds. No such mandate exists for private RTOs to report on public funding expenditure in a transparent manner. This situation needs to be rectified.

The contestable funding agenda has caused increased competition in the VET sector both in terms of the number of RTOs and the number of courses offered by these RTOs. With each additional RTO there is a significant proportion of VET and higher education funding diverted away from actual delivery of education to students into administration and capital expenditure. In effect, the competitive model which supposedly aims to drive down the cost of educational provision actually results in increased student fees and duplication of courses in the ACT.

In the schools and colleges, there is also considerable duplication of courses and associated administration whereby each college competes with other colleges, CIT and private RTO's to deliver VET training. Efficiency in this sector could be enhanced markedly by the DET accepting responsibility to be the single RTO for all colleges in the public education system. Current proposals to introduce Trades Training Centres in the ACT only serve to increase this replication of RTOs and associated administration costs. The AEU prefers VET provision across the small jurisdiction of the ACT that is complementary rather than competitive.

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