



The ALP's Teacher Performance Management Agenda

By Rob Durbridge, outgoing Federal AEU Industrial Officer

Now that the ALP has formed government its election announcements need closer examination.

The most significant policy affecting the employment of school teachers is the ALP's "Reward Payments" policy for teacher performance management. The scheme will be based on the National Professional Standards for Teachers due to be introduced in 2011. The new policy announced that these standards will then be used as the basis of a mandatory national performance management scheme for all teachers, commencing in 2013.

The ALP policy (available at <http://alp.org.au/agenda/school-reform/performance-pay/>) was not subject to any consultation with the AEU before its announcement, although it promises consultation with stakeholders for implementation.

The AEU has been co-operating with and promoting the development and validation by survey and focus groups of standards for proficient teachers under the aegis of AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership). The AEU consistently argued at AITSL that the introduction of such standards should be negotiated for inclusion in industrial agreements because they go to the heart of the role teachers perform and progress in their careers. Agreements and awards universally regulate these matters in all jurisdictions in the country.

Until the new policy was announced, the teaching standards had the function of providing a framework to determine how teacher education courses should be constructed and how a beginning teacher became permanent in the career structure and classified as proficient. These were the only "mandatory" components of the scheme. The "accomplished" level was to be voluntary. Now the ALP has announced that the teacher standards will be made mandatory and linked to the gaining of bonuses.

Two weeks before the election the ALP promised that a Gillard Government would introduce performance management and performance pay using these standards to commence in 2013. Reward payments for approximately 10% of teachers would be funded to provide two payments of \$4050 to experienced teachers or less to those in the early years of teaching, based on where they sit on the salary scale.

This is costed at \$1.25 billion over five years to fund performance bonuses paid to teachers, which is approximately 10% of the cost that the Business Council of Australia put on its scheme for enhanced teacher rewards. School education costs around \$40 billion per annum, so the additional \$250 million per year this scheme represents can be seen in its true light.

Nevertheless, based on previous form, we can expect most state and territory Ministers, Catholic systems and Independent Schools to sign National Partnership Agreements to gain revenue like this. The policy says that the system will be developed from the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Teacher Quality.

The unions would then be presented with a fait accompli new NPA and expected to implement the scheme, either by incorporation into industrial agreements/awards or as an individual contract system on top of these instruments; there is no alternative.

The scheme will have these features:

- All teachers will be required to participate in the national performance management scheme.
- A national system of performance management called the “Australian Teacher Performance Management Principles and Procedures” will be introduced in 2013 after development by AITSL.
- The scheme will provide constructive feedback, advice, training and support.
- These procedures will be based on the National Professional Standards for Teachers currently being validated which will be introduced in 2011.
- The criteria will cover elements such as student achievement, contribution to the school community, including support to other teachers, teamwork and participation in extra-curricular activity.
- The Scheme will provide one-off bonus payments to the top performing 10% of teachers, or 25,000 across Australia, as determined by a panel.
- A range of methods will be used to assess a teacher’s performance including lesson observations, analysis of student performance data, including NAPLAN and school-based information, parental feedback and qualifications and PD undertaken.
- Assessment will be conducted by a panel including the principal, a senior regional staff representative and an independent third party. There will be an independent review and appeals process.
- Student feedback will be considered in the consultation phase which will incorporate stakeholders including unions, private and public employers, professional teaching bodies and parents and student representatives.
- PD resources and other materials will be developed by AITSL
- A National Implementation Plan will be developed with stakeholders and provided to States and Territories to implement the new Principles and realign current management practices to the national model, funded by a \$50 million “facilitation payment.”
- Teachers will be assessed on a state wide basis “meaning that more or less than ten per cent of teachers in a particular school may receive performance pay. (sic)”

This proposal is highly reminiscent of the research proposals by the new member for Fraser (ACT), Andrew Leigh, an academic econometrician who has long advocated performance pay. It is also reminiscent of many of the schemes for performance pay which have come and gone in the US over 20 years or more, and the inspectorial bonus system operating in the UK under Ofsted, the government body which oversees the work of schools.

It is unclear how the Commonwealth intends to implement this scheme given that pay and classification requirements are currently regulated by collective agreements or awards in all states and territories. The policy cites the new category of Highly Accomplished Teacher in NSW and the Victorian pilot scheme for a performance bonus both of which were introduced under National Partnership Agreements between the Commonwealth and the States. However, these were for voluntary positions and involve only a handful of teachers on a temporary basis.

The international experience of such one-off bonus schemes is that they are divisive and counter-productive and are usually abandoned within two years in a welter of conflict involving teachers, principals, parents and systems. Given the experiences of most state and territory teacher unions with previous career reform experiments it is highly unlikely that members would vote for such schemes in the course of enterprise bargaining. It would be a brave union official who would publicly want to be tagged with this scheme which any teacher will pick as lacking any professional or industrial integrity.

The AEU adopted policy at the Federal Conference in 2006 to oppose performance pay then being proposed by the Howard Government. This will need to be revisited in the light of the concrete ALP policy proposal and a strategy to deal with it adopted, probably at the 2011 Federal Conference.

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