



2009 AEU Schools Enterprise Agreement - Circular 1

PLEASE BRING THIS MATERIAL TO THE ATTENTION OF ALL AEU MEMBERS

SCHOOLS SECTOR BARGAINING **PROGRESSING POSITIVELY**

This Circular contains important information about the current Schools Enterprise Agreement negotiations.

Following Council endorsement in November 2008, the AEU served the Claim for the next round of salaries and conditions bargaining on DET late in 2008. Negotiations towards a new Enterprise Agreement for teachers in the Schools Sector have been underway since the beginning of February 2009, with weekly meetings occurring between DET and AEU negotiators.

Early in the discussions DET advised the AEU that Cabinet had determined the following parameters for the teachers' bargaining round:

- 3% p.a. Treasury funding for salary increases;
- an Agreement of up to 4 years in duration; and
- any productivity savings identified as part of the bargaining able to be used to boost salary quantum or to buy conditions.

The AEU immediately indicated that 3%p.a. funding would not produce a salary outcome competitive with the rates achieved in other jurisdictions, and that the AEU had not finalised its position regarding the length of a new agreement. Aware that the quantum of salary increase and the duration of the Agreement are always the last matters to settle in a negotiation, the AEU and DET agreed to set those issues aside and to explore what agreement could be achieved on matters other than salary that had been tabled by either party.

The issue of Mobility provisions for the next Agreement has been the matter to which the largest amount of attention has been given to date. The AEU sought DET agreement to our Claim around changes to the mobility process. DET made clear that it would not abandon its fundamental position of requiring teachers to move around the system, but indicated that there were some aspects of the AEU proposal that it was prepared to consider. The AEU negotiators worked with DET to identify what aspects of the AEU Claim DET would consider, and subsequently to negotiate a new proposal for *teacher transfer* to replace the mobility provisions in the next Agreement. The results of negotiations on that issue are now with Sub-Branches for a vote to determine majority membership support or otherwise.

While it is an unusual step to take matters back to the members for a vote during negotiations, the AEU negotiators appreciate the sensitivity of this issue and the need for a clear understanding of the AEU membership position ahead of any proposed final package for consideration.

Another major issue about which discussions have been conducted is the Accomplished Teacher provision. Both AEU and DET recognise that the Federal COAG Agenda on this item will impact significantly on negotiations, and the AEU has indicated that it will not sign up to an Accomplished Teacher provision without knowing and agreeing to the standards that will determine access, and the process by which access to the classification will be provided. Given that the draft standards are not expected to be released before the end of June at the earliest, this presents a significant problem in including the detail of Accomplished Teacher in this agreement. The AEU understands that the ACT Government will require some commitment to establishing the classification of Accomplished Teacher in the next Agreement in order to meet their election commitment of \$100,000 salaries for the "best teachers", and to meet the requirements of the COAG NPP on Teacher Quality to which the ACT Government has signed up (along with all other State & Territory governments). The AEU's Claim supports the introduction of Accomplished Teacher, so we are

attempting to reach some agreement about a way forward that takes account of the external issues and the professional needs of our members.

Other significant matters that have been canvassed include:

- measures to address teacher workload issues in the system (and potential to leverage relief off the ACT Government proposal to provide extra teachers to reduce average class size across the system);
- capacity to reallocate administrative functions from promotions positions (and potential to leverage off ACT Government election commitment around additional ancillary support);
- DET proposal for accelerated progression on the incremental scale for high-performing teachers (this meets a COAG commitment about reward & recognition);
- potential for a single incremental date across the system (creates administrative savings & streamlines a number of processes);
- school category determination and recognition of “complexity”.

There continue to be discussions about these and other issues, but no definite proposals have been finalised at this stage.

The salary issue has come back into stark relief with the ACT Budget, which reneges on the Cabinet commitment to provide Treasury funding for teacher salary increases of 3%p.a. in each year of an Agreement. The Budget provides only 2% on 2009-2010, and 2.5% for each year thereafter. This is a serious undermining of the already-difficult negotiating position facing the AEU and DET. As well, it certainly calls into question the ACT Government's repeated claims to value and support their teaching workforce. The AEU has been very vocal about our concern that the ACT will not be an employer of choice with the uncompetitive salaries provided by such a small pool of funding, and continues to pressure Government and other politicians to increase the Treasury provision for teacher salary increases. Meanwhile, DET continues to explore its own capacity to augment the Treasury provision.

The Global Financial Crisis has clearly had an impact on ACT Government revenue, and members will be well aware of Government calls for wage restraint from all employees. From the AEU's perspective, the original position of 3%p.a. Treasury funding was clearly wage restraint for the teaching service, given the gap in salary this provision opens up between ACT teachers and their counterparts in the ACT non-government sector and teachers in interstate jurisdictions. In these circumstances, it seems likely that an Agreement of 4 years in duration will not provide salary and conditions outcomes sufficient to justify signing on for such a relatively long term, and this will be a matter shortly to come to the forefront of consideration.

The AEU and DET are both committed to attempting to finalise a new Agreement by the end of June 2009 in order to secure a pay increase from the first available date of 1 July 2009. To that end, the parties expect to be increasing the amount of time allocated to negotiations from next week. The AEU is seeking to have a draft Agreement ready for consideration at the Branch Council meeting on 20 June, and all parties are very aware of the work to be done on the next few weeks if that goal is to be reached.

Both the AEU and DET believe that the best chance of an early settlement probably lies in a shorter Agreement, and so each side is finalising the list of issues that it believes would be necessary to settle a 2-year Agreement, together with proposals for how the matters identified could be progressed. At this point there is real commitment to putting together a package that addresses the key issues on the table and maximises the available salary offer. Whether the efforts succeed, and whether any package developed is acceptable to AEU members remains to be seen.

The AEU will keep members updated on developments. Watch out for further Salary Bulletins from this point forward.

PENNY GILMOUR
Branch Secretary

27 May 2009