



# Australian Education Union 2009 Annual Federal Conference

## Conference Statement

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Federal Conference 2008 welcomed the election of the Rudd Labor Government because it presented an opportunity for a change in policy direction following more than a decade of systematic attack on public education and training. As it enters its second year in office, the Rudd Government's 'Education Revolution' has fallen far short of meeting the levels of funding and policy change required for a genuine 'revolution' in education in Australia.

As noted by Dr Jim McMorrow in his report *Updating the evidence: the Rudd Government's intentions for schools*, whilst the Rudd Government has responded to pressures and evidence pointing to the benefits of investing public moneys in quality teaching and in schools serving students from low socio-economic status backgrounds....what is now needed is a further sign, both in word and deed, that the Rudd Government understands fully the broader fundamental role of public schools in safeguarding and advancing the national interest through providing a framework of universal opportunity for all to gain the benefits of education.

In constructing this framework, the Rudd Government must abandon discredited neo-liberal policies which have resulted in the marketisation, commodification and privatisation of education. Now more than ever, with the failure of the "free market" having been exposed, governments should be providing certainty through a dramatic increase in funding and confidence in the public institutions that guarantee every citizen's right to quality pre-school, school and post compulsory public education and other essential public services that are the hallmark of civil society.

Each Budget cycle, and ultimately the 2010 review of schools funding, provides the Rudd Government with further opportunity to end the bias of the Howard years in favour of private schools.

Government policies aimed at increasing contestable funding and introducing 'student entitlement' vouchers will lead to the undermining of TAFE and its educational role in both technical and further education. The consequent impact on disadvantaged groups and their access to vocational education and training will be serious. Funding commitments to TAFE must be maintained by all governments.

In the implementation of the Federal Government's Early Childhood Education policy meaningful consultation is required with the AEU and its branches and associated bodies, particularly in matters of teacher education, teaching and learning issues and issues of industrial concern.

The quality of education is also determined by the level of government investment in high standard pre-service and in-service education training and support for the profession. It also requires governments to respect and value the professionalism of teachers in the development and delivery of a rigorous, rich and rewarding curriculum accessible by all students; abandon failed and damaging “accountability” measures; provide adequate resourcing and support for the establishment of a culture of evaluation and progressive refinement and improvement in all educational settings; and demonstrate trust in teachers in the effective assessment and reporting of student progress and achievement.

Central to our commitment to public education provision of the highest quality in every community is a fundamental belief in the transformational power of public education and what it can do for each individual child and the nation as a whole.

Whilst welcoming the historic Apology by the Rudd Government, it must abandon its inadequate, piecemeal and misguided approach to the needs of Indigenous students and their communities. The goal of closing the achievement gap and achieving an equality of learning outcomes for Indigenous students requires the development of a comprehensive policy underpinned by the recognition that “more of the same” is not good enough.

With respect to Industrial Relations, whilst the Rudd Government has fulfilled its election commitment to abolish Workchoices, the Fair Work Bill fails to meet the expectations of ordinary working people and the union movement. Restrictions on collective bargaining, the rights to organise, take industrial action and the arbitration of disputes where necessary must be removed. An enduring settlement requires laws which genuinely balance the power of employers with individual and collective rights in the workplace.

The challenges before us put at a premium our capacity to reach out to win even broader community support and to campaign effectively for change on a broad progressive agenda central to which is a fair industrial relations system and a public education system of the highest quality – the key to a vibrant, socially cohesive and prosperous Australia.