



Australian Education Union - Federal Office

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NATIONAL TEACHER BODY ELECTS NEW LEADER

Ms Pat Byrne has been elected the new leader of Australia's pre-eminent teacher organisation, the Australian Education Union.

A long time teacher and first woman President of the AEU's West Australian Branch, Pat was, with comprehensive national support, officially declared elected to the position of Federal President late last Friday.

"It's a challenging time to be taking up the reins – on the eve of a Federal Budget where public education is in danger of being increasingly neglected by a government which see itself as the champion of the private sector. But it's a challenge I'm looking forward too" Ms Byrne said.

She takes over from Denis Fitzgerald, who has taken a senior position with the New South Wales Department of Education.

"Denis was an eloquent and passionate advocate for public education, and I intend to build upon the firm foundation he has laid" Ms Byrne said.

"In particular, I intend to continue the teaching profession's fight to claw back valuable public education funding, which has been systematically redirected to the elite private sector."

"It's clear to me that private schools have used their influence and exploited the 'old school' network to extract more than their fair share of funding from the public purse."

"I don't believe influence should be the preserve of the rich – the challenge facing me is to increase the political clout of the education system that provides for the majority, in the face of staunch opposition of the small clique of elitist schools. It's a challenge public education can – and will – meet" Ms Byrne said.

"Our public schools cater for around 70% of our nation's children – that's nearly three quarters of all Australians putting their trust in public schools to give their children the education they deserve. It's heartening to see this level of support for our most valuable investment in the future – Australians are clearly choosing public schools because they want to, not because they have to. It's time governments recognised that they too must invest in the system that three-quarters of their constituents place their faith in."

Pat Byrne is respected in education circles as a committed and determined advocate for public education.

Herself a product of the public education system, Pat has travelled extensively and enjoyed a full life, from running a French restaurant, to dedicating herself to standing up for others as a committed unionist.

Upon Mr Fitzgerald's departure she assumed the role of Acting President, representing some 155,000 public educators across the nation, prior to election as President.

For further information, please contact:

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