

Australian Education Union

Policy on Gender Equity

As adopted at
Federal Executive
May 2008

© **Australian Education Union**
Federal Office
120 Clarendon Street
Southbank 3006



Australian Education Union

Policy on Gender Equity

Contents	Page
1. <i>Scope and Purpose</i>	1
2. <i>Definitions</i>	2
3. <i>Cross-Reference</i>	3
4. <i>Positions Arising</i>	3
5. <i>Subsumes</i>	3
6. <i>Principles</i>	3
...	
7. <i>Policy Inclusions</i>	6
7.1 Teaching and Learning, culture and organisation.....	6
7.2 Educational Settings and the Community.....	7
7.3 Educational Rights of Women and Girls.....	8
7.4 Health and Human Relationships including sex and sexuality education.....	10
- sexual health	
- fertility	
- sexual exploitation	
- violence in partnerships	
- sexual identities	
7.5 Equity issues related to pregnant and parenting students.....	13
7.6 Women's access to career education, post-selection education and training....	14
7.7 Women and Post-Secondary Education (TAFE and Tertiary).....	15
7.8 Women's Access to Broad Educational Programs.....	16
7.9 Flexible Learning.....	17

7.10	Women and Decision Making.....	17
7.11	Adequate Funding Levels.....	18
7.12	Fees and Income Support.....	18
7.13	Gender-Segregation within Educational Programs.....	19
7.14	Gender Parity and Equity in Apprenticeships/Traineeships.....	20
7.15	Adult and Community Education.....	20
7.16	Moving into Employment – General Issues.....	21
8.	<i>Supporting the profession to practice gender equity.....</i>	22
9.	<i>Status of women educators.....</i>	23

Australian Education Union

Policy on Gender Equity

1. *Scope and Purpose*

- 1.1 The *AEU Gender Equity and Future Opportunities* policy applies broadly to all education settings in Australia but more specifically to public education where the AEU's membership is located – including early childhood, school and TAFE/adult education. It relates to the AEU's beliefs regarding the educational experiences of students as well as their health, welfare and indeed concern for post-educational outcomes also.

Debates on girls' and boys' achievement

- 1.2 Though the AEU has an ongoing belief in the need for gender equity in education and society broadly, in the context of debates on girls' and boys' achievement challenges emerge. For some commentators, the boys' education agenda provides a conduit for anti-feminist beliefs. A disturbingly common fallacy is the argument that the focus on raising girls' achievement has led to a neglect of boys. These arguments include criticism of the 'feminisation' of the teaching profession through a perceived lack of male role models and the consequent 'feminisation' of curriculum content. Some of these commentators also maintain that 'traditional' girls' behaviour (passive, cooperative, verbal, etc.) is valued over 'traditional' boys' behaviour (active, competitive and non-verbal) with consequences for boys' educational outcomes.
- 1.3 The AEU believes such comments are simplistic by nature, defining a whole group of boys in opposition to a whole group of girls. It is not true that all girls succeed or outperform boys at school. Moreover academic success for those girls who succeed at school has not necessarily translated into commensurate post school success in terms of employment.
- 1.4 The AEU believes that poor analysis creates simplistic reactionary 'solutions'. These include the removal of targeted strategies for girls and their replacement with more general strategies for boys.
- 1.5 More complex analyses of gender argue that boys' behaviour, like girls', is confined and limited by socially acceptable and socially affirmed definitions of masculinity and femininity. Such analyses provide an alternative to the anti-feminist 'backlash' theory and reveal potentially fruitful strategies because they acknowledge the diverse range of masculinities and femininities that students in preschools, schools and TAFE/adult education institutions possess.

- 1.6 The purpose of the policy is to outline the AEU's commitment to ensuring the needs of both genders are equally accounted for during their education. In doing so the AEU states its understanding of gender equity, the way gender impacts on the educational experiences of students, preferred policy responses to gender in education and the challenges that exist which may limit the full achievement of gender equality post-education.

2. *Definitions*

2.1 **Gender Equity**

The AEU supports a definition of ***Gender Equity*** based on understanding the construction of gender and the different relationships of power and privilege in our society. The AEU supports a view of Gender Equity based on the concept of working for social justice. This means understanding the issues of gender, class, Aboriginality, race, culture and sexuality and how they impact on students and society.

Gender Equity is more than the elimination of discrimination to ensure *equal treatment* between genders, but is about ensuring gender is recognised and hence appropriate (and possibly differing) responses will enable equity of *outcomes and achievement* for both genders.

2.2 **Gender**

The AEU's understanding is that while sex is biologically determined it is quite clear that gender is a construct of society. Children do not learn how to be female and male in passive ways. Rather individuals actively develop a gendered identity through interacting with the myriad messages and practices they encounter in society.

Gender is socially constructed and is fundamental in the development of self concept and in shaping the range of experiences and opportunities available to women and men. Gender responds to social change and accordingly differs from one society to another across social classes, ethnic and cultural groups and within the same society over time. Gender is dynamic and is influenced by class, religion, culture, geographic location, family and community.

The AEU recognises that girls and boys, young women and men (like men and women), are all restricted by, and often victims of socially defined expectations and limitations. Many students both male and female do not fulfil their potential at preschool, schools and TAFE institutions and experience gender stereotyping which narrows and/or impacts negatively on their school, future lives, career options and opportunities. This can be compounded by the impact of stereotypical assumptions based on class, race, Aboriginality, culture and sexuality.

3. *Cross-Reference*

This policy, to fully appreciate the numerous factors which create and compound disadvantage for both genders, should be considered alongside the following AEU policies:

- AEU Women Working in Education Policy 2008
- AEU Policy A Charter for Fair Go Schooling 2004
- AEU Policy on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex People 2006
- AEU Youth Transitions and Pathways Policy 2007
- AEU Policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2002
- AEU Policy on TAFE for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2004
- AEU Policy on Adult Migrant English Services/Adult Migrant Education Program 2007

4. *Positions Arising*

There are currently no positions arising from this policy.

5. *Subsumes*

This policy amends and subsumes the AEU Gender Equity Policy 2003.

6. *Principles*

“Progress in education requires building a culture of equity. In a culture of equity, all forms of injustice are automatically contested, and an ethic of mutual care, not the search for competitive advantage, is central to policy making” stated Bob Connell. The AEU is committed to promoting Gender Equity in educational settings to bring about a safe and challenging learning environment for all students.

- 6.1 Preschools, schools and TAFE/adult education institutions play an active role in the development of a range of femininities and masculinities through student relationships with teachers, peers, the school and the college culture, through curriculum offerings and courses.

- 6.2 Preschools, schools and TAFE/adult education institutions must therefore assist all students to understand the pressures upon them to behave within the narrow range of the socially accepted and socially affirmed forms of masculinity and femininity. This must occur in an environment that does not apportion blame on girls and boys, young women and men individually or as a group. Rather it should occur in the context of understanding and challenging inequality in our society.
- 6.3 The AEU recognises that a narrow interpretation of assessment data which superficially indicates that girls and young women are out-achieving boys and young men in some curriculum areas is simplistic. This interpretation does not address the equity issues of exactly which groups of boys are not achieving and which groups of girls are achieving. It also fails to address the question of the status of the areas of curriculum in which success is occurring, as some of these are not valued equally by the broader community. It is also important to note that success in education does not necessarily lead to a broadening of post-school options for all girls and young women.
- 6.4 The AEU believes that the critical factor in achieving Gender Equity is cultural change. The AEU recognises that the implementation of Gender Equity policies varies from state to state as well as school to school and relies on the commitment of individual teachers. Therefore, the AEU calls upon federal and state governments to provide proper funding for training and development, additional release time for teachers, resources and additional funding for implementation of strategies, policies and procedures. The areas for systematic action include teaching and learning; educational settings and the community; the development of the profession and the status of women educators.
- 6.5 The AEU is committed to developing and maintaining ongoing partnerships between Federal and State systems, education settings and their communities, parent and community organisations and industry, in the fulfilment of the long term goal of achieving Gender Equity.
- 6.6 The AEU Policy on Gender Equity recognises :
- the gendered nature of education in preschools, schools and TAFE/adult institutions;
 - the gendered nature of paid and unpaid work;
 - power and economic imbalances which exist between women and men;
 - different relationships of power and privilege in our society;
 - that some constructions of gender may result in destructive and oppressive forms of masculinity impacting negatively on both girls and boys, young women and men;

- that some constructions of femininity impact negatively on both girls and boys, young women and men;
 - that girls and women continue to be seriously disadvantaged compared to boys and men in employment and training;
 - sexuality as a Gender Equity issue.
- 6.7 The AEU believes that changing the culture of education systems and settings is fundamental to the achievement of Gender Equity. The culture of education systems, education organisations and their management structures and practices transmit strong messages about the value placed on participation of girls and women, boys and men in the education system and the wider society.
- 6.8 The AEU believes that educators' knowledge and understanding of Gender Equity are critical to bringing about this culture of change. Pre-service education and professional development is essential if educators are to address the construction of gender and the impact this has on teaching and learning.
- 6.9 The AEU believes that to achieve an equitable educational environment there must be system wide training for management about gender inclusive practices.
- 6.10 The AEU endorses and supports the principles for action set out in the MCEETYA document *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, (1997) and sees this document as the key foundation upon which to build future policy development.
- 6.11 The AEU believes that the promotion of effective and appropriate educational practice requires the commitment of federal and state systems and education settings to an integrated, holistic and adequately resourced Gender Equity Strategy which incorporates:
- curriculum reform;
 - organisational change;
 - equitable use of and access to space, facilities and equipment;
 - in-service support and professional development for educators;
 - participation of parents and the community;
 - a partnership with industry in post-compulsory settings;
 - strategies for eliminating violence and harassment;
 - revised behaviour management strategies;
 - education in life skills for both girls and boys, young women and men;

- strategies for promoting and implementing welfare policies and programs;
- extra time release within educational settings for teachers to develop effective strategies and programs;
- funds to allow 'best practice' models to be developed and promoted across systems;
- full time Gender Equity workers to assist and advise teachers in preschools, schools and TAFE institutions and other post-compulsory educational settings;
- ongoing reflection and evaluation which is both internal and external and which involves partnerships between all state and territory education authorities across all sectors including preschools, schools, TAFE institutions and tertiary institutions;
- effective and appropriate monitoring and accountability mechanisms;
- a non-competitive approach to resource allocations;
- access to life long learning for women and men;
- personnel and employment practices which support diversity;
- the re-establishment of a national advisory body on Gender Equity;
- support for research and innovative practice.

7. *Policy Inclusions*

7.1 **Teaching and Learning, culture and organisation**

Preschools, schools and TAFE/adult education institutions need to:

- ensure that the principles and understandings of Gender Equity underpin and are incorporated into all aspects of curriculum development, delivery and workplace organisations.
- ensure the incorporation of the range of experience, knowledge, skills and aspirations of girls and women, boys and men.
- develop current understandings of masculinities, and the relationships between these understandings and behaviours that are damaging and destructive to girls and women, boys and men.
- support early intervention for girls and boys in the areas of literacy and numeracy in ways that provide opportunities for students to recognise and challenge dominant constructions of gender.
- challenge attitudes to continuing sex segregation apparent in subject choices.
- maintain high expectations for all girls and boys, young women and men regardless of background.
- challenge disruptive and dominating behaviour.

- have an awareness of and address issues relating to the physical and psychological health and wellbeing of students, which may present differently for boys and girls.
- incorporate a wide range of teaching and assessment, recording and reporting methods.
- develop and implement strategies to address the issues of participation and retention of particular groups of girls and boys, young women and men.

7.2 Educational settings and the community

- 7.2.1 A focus on the social construction of gender is useful for boys and men and girls and women in education. Such a focus makes it possible to address how social constructions of masculinities and femininities limit and restrict boys' and young men's and girls' and young women's options and activities at school, in their family lives, with their peers and in workplaces.
- 7.2.2 The AEU encourages and is supportive of the development and implementation of strategies that support the breaking down of the dominant, stereotypical construction of the male.
- 7.2.3 The AEU believes it is essential to explore and analyse constructions of masculinity and femininity in order to enhance all aspects of the lives of girls and women, boys and men. Provision of this exploration of gender constructions will lay the foundation for a more just and equal society.
- 7.2.4 Dominant, stereotypical constructions of masculinity can lead to boys' and men's estrangement from women, children, other men and their communities.
- 7.2.5 Harassment of girls and boys, young women and men at preschool, school and TAFE institutions continues in ways that cannot always easily be identified by a legal definition and can be caused partly by the ways in which gender stereotypes are maintained and reinforced in these institutions.
- 7.2.6 It continues to be demonstrated that all forms of harassment and bullying of male and female students and workers in preschools, schools and TAFE institutions restrict opportunities and experiences in an educational setting.
- 7.2.7 The reasons for and nature of violence and bullying between boys and girls, boys and boys, and girls and girls in both single sex and coeducational settings in preschools, schools and TAFE institutions must be explored and identified and strategies developed to eliminate this type of behaviour.

Therefore the AEU insists that:

- gendered violence and sex-based harassment must be eliminated from all educational settings by teaching about the construction of gender,

effective communication and relationship skills, conflict management and resolution skills with staff and students at preschools, schools and TAFE institutions;

- whole school approaches to identifying and eliminating gendered violence and disruptive behaviours are implemented so it does not become simply the responsibility of individuals in educational settings to deal with these issues;
- behavior management policies and strategies that are consistent with the principles of Gender Equity and that identify behaviours which inhibit the learning of girls and boys, young women and men are implemented.

7.3 Educational rights of women and girls

While a gender equity approach to education responds to the specific needs of both genders equally, there is the need for specific and isolated action for women and girls.

The *United Nations' (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26* states that, “*Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.*”

The AEU, within the context of supporting Gender Equity in education, specifically draws attention to the educational rights of women and girls as being a fundamental human right; one that is not currently universally accessible.

The UN's Millennium Development Goals specified the aim of achieving gender parity in primary education, towards the goal of 'education for all'. However, this aim was not met by its declared timeline of 2005 – too many girls across the globe miss out on basic education.

The UN reports that hurdles for getting girls into school include:

- poverty,
- gender roles and cultural traditions,
- HIV/AIDS,
- armed conflict and other emergencies,
- lack of accountability and inadequate education infrastructure.

The AEU wholly supports the 'education for all' goal and understands the benefits of achieving gender parity in education are crucial. The UN emphasizes that:

- None of the Millennium Development Goals will likely be met unless there is significant progress in girls' education.

- Illiteracy is a catastrophe for any child but particularly devastating for girls.
- Educating girls has cascading benefits.
- Educating girls benefits both boys and girls.
- Gender parity in education will lead to gender equality in society.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) explains the benefits of investment in girls' education as trickling "down to the next generation, with improved health and survival rates for infants and children, reduced rates of fertility, higher rates of schooling for the next generation and greater spheres of influence within the family, community and political arena. When an entire generation of girls is educated, the trickle turns into a gush of possibility." (2005, UNICEF, p6)

http://www.ungei.org/gap/pdfs/unicef_gap_low_res.pdf

In Australia, whilst the gap in education is not as severe, the virtues of ensuring and valuing equity for girls in education are just as strong.

7.3.1 The AEU is committed to ensuring that at both Commonwealth and State/Territory level, education, training and employment programs are designed, resourced and delivered in a way that recognises the particular economic and social rights of women and girls.

7.3.2 *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, (1997) is endorsed as the framework which should continue to be implemented at the Commonwealth and State/Territory level. Any gender equity framework/policy should include:

- Measures to increase girls' participation in mathematics, science, economics and technology, by reviewing the content and methodology of courses in these areas and by increasing the numbers of women teaching them, as well as increase the participation of boys and young men in subjects viewed traditionally as 'female'.
- Research, counselling, legal, in-service and professional support to assist teachers dealing with child sexual abuse.
- Counter-sexist curriculum for the earliest years of schooling.
- Further consultation and policy development on the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls.
- Recognition of the rights of girls from culturally and linguistically diverse background, both to English as a second language, and to community language education.
- Further research and policy development on the educational needs of girls with disabilities.
- Recognition of the educational rights of pregnant students and provision for their needs.

- Comprehensive counter-sexist and culturally sensitive health and human relationships education including sex education, available to all students. Well designed educational programs enable a discussion of diverse sexualities. Teachers of health and human relationships education should have an understanding of sexism, sexual politics, and the politics of health in order to deal with any prejudices, myths and superstitions which may exist or arise in classroom situations.
- Support for the use of single sex girls classes within co-educational schools/colleges, and the AEU also supports single sex girls schools which are providing affirmative action programs within the context of a broad curriculum. Any support for single sex classes in schools must be in a context of how they work to break down power imbalances and negative, destructive or oppressive constructions of gender.
- The establishment of a Commonwealth funded program, providing forward-committed funding for addressing the multiple educational disadvantages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, girls from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, girls with disabilities, rural and working class girls.

Implementation of gender policy is most effective when teachers are able to act on their own awareness of the problem. Effective curriculum development can only occur if teachers are involved in the properly resourced planning, implementation and evaluation of programs.

7.4 **Health and human relationships including sex and sexuality education**

This section should be read with reference to the AEU policy on gay lesbian bisexual transgender and intersex people 2006, particularly section 7. "sex education"

7.4.1 At all stages of life, girls and women are at risk of sexual violence and exploitation. Understanding the implications of gender relations, abuses of power, sexual health and wellbeing and expressions of sexuality can be valuable protection against manifestations of gender inequity.

7.4.2 For reasons specifically including:

- sexual exploitation;
- sexual health (HIV AIDS, STIs and fertility);
- sexual identities;
- violence in partnerships;
- equity issues related to pregnant and parenting students, and

- negative body image, self esteem and self harm.

The AEU believes that for both girls and boys there is a need for early continuous human relations and sexuality education within comprehensive educational programs.

7.4.3 First and foremost, the AEU considers that:

- It is preferable to include comprehensive sex education programs within broad health and human relationships education curricula (which includes areas such as safety, environmental and consumer health).
- Health and human relationships programs should be counter-sexist and culturally sensitive.
- Health and human relationships should be developed in a manner that encourages critical thinking and considered decision making by students.
- Health and human relationships programs should reflect the interests and concerns of, in particular, students and other members of the school community.
-

7.4.4 The AEU believes that human relations and sexuality education should be designed to help students to:

sexual health

- Understand risks to and take responsibility for the sexual health of themselves and others.
- Make decisions and act on the basis of knowledge and not on the basis of ignorance, fear and unquestioned prejudice, and to
- Prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

fertility

- Have a full understanding of the human reproductive system for both sexes and the fertility implications for themselves and others
- Know about contraception methods, their practical use, and of options and rights regarding emergency contraception and unplanned pregnancy.

sexual exploitation

- Understand boundaries relating to their sexual rights and unwanted intrusions,
- Resisting and recognising the early sexualisation of young girls and

children.

violence in partnerships

- Negotiate healthy human relations that include physical, emotional, psychological and financial safety and independence
- Recognise the signs of unhealthy and abusive situations in theirs and others' relationships
- Know where to seek advice and support when challenging or leaving abusive relationships

Body image, self esteem and self harm

- Enable girls and boys to develop a positive body image, gives strategies to prevent self harm and strategies to build and maintain a healthy self esteem.

sexual identities

- Understand diversity and have discussions about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex issues with a positive approach;

7.4.5 Further, regarding human sexuality curriculum the AEU urges affiliates to:

- Raise discussions with teacher-training institutions on the provision of human sexuality programs in their courses and that such courses should aim at:
 - assisting teachers to understand their own sexuality and that of others, particularly adolescents.
 - preparing teachers willing to teach human sexuality within appropriate courses.

7.4.6 The AEU also considers that:

- Any teacher-directed presentation or discussion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex sexualities in a class situation should aim to be positive in approach within an understanding of the implications of sexuality.
- Teachers of health and human relationships should have an understanding of sexism, sexual politics, and the politics of health in order to deal with any prejudices, myths and superstitions which may exist or arise in class situations.
- The sexual preference, marital status and/or parental status of individual teachers should not be a factor in determining which teachers are able to teach health and human relationships.

In professionally supporting the teaching of human relations and sexuality, the AEU:

- Demands and supports the development of in-service programs on health

and human relationships and sexuality. These courses to be developed in conjunction with teacher unions and relevant community agencies and research bodies, and to be funded by the appropriate State or Federal Government.

- Demands that time release be made available to teachers involved in co-ordinating these programs within schools/colleges.
- Defends existing health, human relations and sexuality courses in schools from attacks which seek to both curtail these programs and censor positive information on sexuality, especially in regard to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex sexualities.
- Recommends that health and human relationships programs and related areas should be co-ordinated between and within schools and colleges.
- Seeks from the relevant State/Territory Government and central and regional Education Department authorities an adequate yearly allocation of in-service education dealing with health and human relationships education, including sex and sexuality education.
- Encourages wherever possible the promotion of health and human relationships education including sex and sexuality education within the teaching service and among educational, school and college communities.

7.5 **Equity issues related to pregnant and parenting students**

Young women and girls who become parents whilst still at school and even in the tertiary years, encounter great challenges to continue their education. However, the necessity to ensure they complete their schooling cannot be underestimated.

The AEU recognises that the consequences of not completing a secondary education for a young mother are:

- social isolation
- a higher risk of violent or unhealthy relationships
- a higher risk of welfare dependency and/or poverty
- a reduced capacity and likelihood to return to schooling or post-school education and training

The AEU supports the needs of pregnant and parenting students and believes they must be catered for during their education to ensure they are not disadvantaged in accessing the educational opportunities they pursue and deserve, as is their right.

Therefore, the AEU believes:

- programs and policy aimed at retaining pregnant and parenting students are essential
- adequate government assistance to aid childcare costs and access care places must be maintained as a priority
- flexible approaches to workload, assessment, attendance requirements, costs related to schools and other welfare considerations need to be met by the education community to ensure pregnant and parenting students have every chance to complete their education free of discrimination
- professional development, training and resources to educators to support the needs of pregnant and parenting students

7.6 Women's access to career education, post-selection education and training

7.6.1 The AEU supports the provision of career education for all students which aims to assist students to realise their potential and employment opportunities without being subjected to sex-biased information concerning employment.

7.6.2. The AEU believes, however, that it is not sufficient for careers advisers and counsellors to make non-sexist vocational information available. Rather, they should actively encourage women and girls to consider non-traditional areas of training as viable vocational options and to place this career choice within a career path framework. Girls and women must be made aware at every stage, of the career implications of their subject choices. Such considerations must include information relating to:

- potential income
- working conditions which may or may not support family/fertility choices
- skills required, such as negotiation, to ensure rights at work are known, accessed and advanced
- the gender balance in the industry/sector
- academic aptitude required to complete study.

7.6.3 The AEU recognises that career and further education decisions are limited by earlier subject choices. Therefore, career education should aim at being integrated into the total school program at all levels, especially primary.

7.6.4 The AEU recognises that vocational education is an important part of the education of girls and that the development of gender inclusive vocational curriculum is an imperative. Such curriculum content and practice, with educator involvement being essential in its development, should:

- avoid gender-based streaming;
- improve girls' critical understanding of new technologies; and
- provide experience of technology within traditional as well as non-traditional subject areas.

7.7 **Women and Post-Secondary Education (TAFE and Tertiary)**

[to be read in conjunction with AEU Policy on Youth Transitions and Pathways 2007]

7.7.1 Educators and governments have a responsibility to develop and provide educational programs relevant to changing social and economic conditions, and able to provide women with skills and training for employment and the full range of occupations within the full range of industry groups. This involves a commitment to provide general and vocational education as well as training which ensures:

- access and success for women school leavers;
access and success for mature-aged women returning to study;
ongoing training for women already in the workforce; and
retraining for women workers displaced by changes in the labour market.

Such education (general and vocational) and training programs must recognise the needs of women in general as well as specific needs of particular groups of women.

7.8 Women's Access to Broad Educational Programs

7.8.1. Whilst acknowledging the value of employment to women, post-secondary education and training should develop women's capacity for career mobility rather than simply skill sets aimed at narrow employment.

7.8.2 Lifelong learning is a crucial concept particularly for women retraining following periods out of the workforce and for 'second chance' learners. Therefore, training programs and institutions must acknowledge the part played in maximising the potential skills and participants in Australia's future workforce, so necessary in terms of social justice and global competition within an aging population.

7.8.3 Pathways within and external to the vocational education and training system (for example between TAFE and University) need to be many and flexible to account for the life skills women may possess and recognition of prior learning must therefore be retained within the system as a strong enabling tool for women to access further and ongoing education.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes themselves however do need to be less complex and the information provided requires greater accessibility for potential students to fully comprehend their options and make decisions about further education.

7.8.4 Further and recurrent education, vocational education, training and re-training provided by public tertiary education institutions are inextricably linked to each other and all are essential programs. Additional resources should recognise the value and relationship between each of these components provided predominantly through the public training system and therefore:

- additional resources for one component should not be at the expense of any other;
- preparatory courses must be provided to ensure access by women to each;
- procedure for cross-accreditation between the components must be developed;
- Compensatory and access programs including literacy programs, self-esteem programs, bridging programs and programs to assist designated disadvantaged groups must be provided.

7.8.5 The AEU believes that courses in community languages should be developed and offered to women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to assist them to gain access to other TAFE/adult education programs. Courses in adult migrant English should be readily available through Government/employer co-operation. Employers should contribute resources for the provision of these courses, including release from work for their employees. The primary language of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds should be properly utilised by permitting attendance at Language Aide, Interpreter or Translator courses, with the provision of appropriate Government/employer incentives including work release and payment of fees by employers.

[see also AEU Policy on Adult Migrant English Services/Adult Migrant Education Program 2007]

7.8.6 All courses and programs, teaching materials and methodology should be gender-inclusive. Gender-inclusive educational provision must take account of the needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as well as women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

7.9 **Flexible Learning**

Flexible learning, importantly provides women with additional options when making decisions about ongoing education, however the AEU acknowledges that there is also the potential for poorly implemented flexible learning practices to facilitate social isolation to the detriment of learning.

The AEU therefore encourages the notion of flexible learning in training delivery where it is well resourced and underpinned with additional student support

7.10 **Women and Decision Making**

7.10.1 Women continue to experience disadvantage in vocational education and training participation and outcomes, particularly in program areas that are least profitable and hence susceptible to funding pressures. There is an ongoing need for the equal representation of women on all advisory and consultative structures advising the Department and Minister for Vocational and Further Education . All representatives on such bodies must have a demonstrable commitment to and act in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity and gender equity principles and policies. More widely, women must have equal representation and a distinct voice on planning, consultative, advisory, regulatory and accreditation committees and authorities, including Industry Skills Councils and workplace committees.

- 7.10.2 The AEU believes that government bureaucracies need to ensure gender policy units remain and work to continually monitor women's employment and education, including TAFE and further education.

National policy for women in vocational education and training must be recognised, valued, resourced and implemented. Women's policy must be visible and targeted, rather than allocated 'general equity' status, as this approach has too often been proved to facilitate neglect and invisibility rather integration .

7.11 Adequate Funding Levels

- 7.11.1 Vocational education funding must be maintained at adequate levels to ensure support services as well as funded programs encourage women in disadvantaged groups can succeed in tertiary study. The provision of general education is imperative for the success of many disadvantaged students and government funding must ensure institutions can viably maintain such programs without transferring their cost onto students. The AEU vigorously advocates the Commonwealth Government accepting its responsibility for the public funding of the needed additional places in TAFE/adult and tertiary education, and in particular to ensure that mature-aged women's tertiary access is maintained and improved. Commonwealth and State/Territory funding models must not be to the detriment of equity within the system nor in outcomes.

7.12 Fees and Income Support

- 7.12.1 Women and under-represented groups of students face educational barriers posed by tertiary fees, including overseas student fees, administrative and other charges and materials fees, and by restrictions in entitlements to study allowances.

AEU recognises that many women students suffer financial hardship and are unable to meet educational expenses due to inadequate income support. Delays, restrictions and strict eligibility requirements for payments of benefits and allowances have also forced tertiary education students to discontinue their studies. Adequate income support which does not discriminate against women or, more generally, against TAFE/adult education students is essential to the participation of many students, especially those from low income backgrounds. The AEU supports the establishment of campus-based emergency loans in TAFE/adult education as one measure which can assist those students who suffer extreme financial hardship.

Government funding for tertiary education, particularly TAFE/adult education, must accommodate essential student support services. Students already facing disadvantage, whether financial, legal, cultural or emotional rely on support services to complete their study. In other circumstances, students can be confronted by crises that occur whilst studying and may have few other avenues to seek assistance from, than on campus. For international students in particular, the challenges they face, in a new country, new culture and often new language go unsupported despite high fees paid for the “privilege” of studying in Australia. For women, student services particularly childcare, can be the difference between completing further study or not.

More broadly, the AEU believes that

- the provision of TAFE/adult education should be at no cost to the student.
- TAFE/adult education should be funded to develop an enhanced role in economic and social planning with a view to improving the coordination between economic planning and training.
- TAFE systems should be rebuilt and redeveloped to form an integrated TAFE system that facilitates access to TAFE courses and provides for both broad and general education and vocational education in a collaborative environment.
- TAFE/adult education should be funded to develop a research capacity for:
 - planning and innovation;
 - New and emerging technologies and practices; and social justice strategies to overcome disadvantage particularly rural, regional and remote disadvantage.

7.13 **Gender-Segregation within Educational Programs**

7.13.1 Despite decades of effort, gender divisions and segregation within the workforce persist and therefore are replicated within educational programs. These divisions contribute to gender inequality in labour market participation, income and conditions.

Contemporary challenges such as labour participation rates, skill shortages (or even over supply), global competition and generational demographics require sensible, non-discriminatory and futures focussed training policies.

The AEU calls on all post-secondary education institutions to examine the participation and concentration of women throughout their courses and programs and to ensure that gender-segregation within education programs is discontinued. To achieve this goal, institutions must ensure that women have access to the full range, and all stages/levels, of courses and programs offered and that barriers to their participation are dismantled.

- 7.13.2 Priority should be given to the development and implementation of programs that will encourage women to enter traditionally male dominated courses in greater numbers and to the orientation of these courses towards women.
- 7.13.3 Priority should also be given to improved resourcing of female-dominated courses and areas of study.
- 7.13.4 AEU advocates post-secondary education institutions specially advertise the range of courses and programs available, including those specifically designed for women, using counter-sexist promotional material.
- 7.13.5 The AEU believes counselling, careers advice and course selection advisory services need to be constantly reviewed to ensure that gender equity considerations are accounted for. Support and information services must actively encourage women in evaluating the broadest possible course offerings, and in understanding conditions and trends in the labour market.

7.14 **Gender Parity and Equity in Apprenticeships/Traineeships**

- 7.14.1 Further to the gender disparity in training and workforce participation, Government programs promoting Apprenticeships and Traineeships need to account for gender parity and equity in their uptake by working with training institutes, employer groups and unions to dispel gender stereotypes and limitations.

Government funding for subsidies towards apprentices or trainees need to be equitably distributed across industries to ensure gender domination of either persuasion in targeted industries doesn't produce inequality.

7.15 **Adult and Community Education**

- 7.15.1 The AEU recognises and supports the crucial role that adult and community-based education plays in building preparedness for future qualifications and employment opportunities. Such opportunities importantly provide women in particular, access to all levels of preparatory/bridging courses and certificate 1 and 2 levels and ideally if undertaken within the public system offers incentives for further qualifications.

7.16 **Moving into Employment - General Issues**

- 7.16.1 Industry policy and industry restructuring plans designed to improve Australia's international competitiveness in skill- and technology-based industries should be linked to a program of recruiting women, including mature-aged women, into apprenticeships and accredited training programs.
- 7.16.2 Planning mechanisms at the national and industry sector council level must be required to facilitate the entry of women into traditionally male dominated fields of employment.
- 7.16.3 In all industry policy plans and industry restructuring, the rights of women workers to retraining and reclassification must be guaranteed. The outcomes of industry planning and of the restructuring of job classifications must be the reduction of existing gender inequalities in employment.
- 7.16.4 Negotiations on technological change should include the provision, with financial support, of adult retraining for women facing retrenchment.
- 7.16.5 Targets must be established for the participation of women in training programs arising out of awards and agreements designed to upgrade skills and provide career paths.
- 7.16.6 Similar opportunities to upgrade skills and provide career paths must be developed in predominantly female industries.
- Contract and casual employment serves to entrench unsociable hours and cheaper, disempowered and captive employees and where this intersects (more often than not) with female dominated workplaces, so too is gender inequality exacerbated. Government should work with industry and unions to move away from such modes of employment and to find flexibilities which do not rob employees of basic rights and dignities.
- Excessive and unsociable hours of work increase work related stress and inhibit employees ability to have a healthy balance between work and family life, but particularly makes family and care responsibilities unmanageable. Women more often experience challenges to their carer roles and therefore reducing excessive and unsociable hours and promoting workplaces responsive to work and family needs should be a national priority.
- 7.16.7 Paid study leave must be recognised as an essential prerequisite for women's access to training and retraining, and must be pursued vigorously for women.

- 7.16.8 The Commonwealth should support and strengthened legislation or policies to encourage women's employment opportunities and should be extended to cover all employed women, as well as to ensure the right to work of disadvantaged groups. Unions should be involved at all stages of drawing up, implementing and evaluating programs. This involvement should include fully representative workplace equity committees. More effective sanctions should be applied, the scope and time-scale of programs should be more clearly defined, and funding should be available for advisory and monitoring services.
- 7.16.9 Targets should be more strictly set and applied for the participation in apprenticeships and traineeships of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, rural women, women living in poverty, and women with disabilities. Government departments should lead the way in this process.
- 7.16.10 Advisory Committees should be established to report to relevant Commonwealth Ministers and Department/s (of Employment, of Education and of Training) concerning the implementation of such targets.
- 7.16.11 As a matter of urgency, on-going and properly resourced programs to improve the employment opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be established, in line with Aboriginal women's needs and community and cultural responsibilities.
- 7.16.12 Employment must be required to recognise the rights of migrant women workers to English on the job training.

8. *Supporting the profession to practice gender equity*

The AEU recommends that all teacher education programs must include:

- a critical analysis of the construction of gender in our multicultural society and the impact of this on the education of students;
- encouragement for women and men to enter and be supported in non-traditional teaching areas at all levels and in all curriculum areas;
- access to and training in the use of current resources available to assist education workers to ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

The AEU recommends that:

- training and development funds are targeted towards addressing Gender Equity issues in the classroom and in particular how these issues impact on student learning outcomes.
- programs be developed and delivered that challenge the teachers' personal constructions of gender and address the real difficulties of translating the highest level of gender consciousness into good teaching practice.

- programs be developed and delivered to assist teachers to challenge the narrowness of subject choices made by girls and boys, young women and men inside the curriculum. Secondly, other assistance be provided to assist teachers to challenge and expand upon students' stereotypical post school options and destinations.
- institutions providing teacher education should ensure that gender equity training is an integral part of all courses in career education and vocational counselling education. Further, unions, employers and government should always be working together to ensure in-service courses are available to all teachers in order that full information about gender implications in careers information is available to teachers and students.
- Programs be developed and delivered to teachers to assist them challenge students levels of understanding and expectations of a fulfilling adult female and male life, including notions of unpaid work. As educators we acknowledge there is a need to encourage girls and boys, young women and men to move outside the traditional curriculum and extra curriculum boundaries.

9. *Status of women educators*

- 9.1 The AEU believes that the implementation of Gender Equity strategies for students can only be successful when inequalities and gender segmentation within the teaching workforce are eliminated. We cannot ignore the contradictions between the stated objectives of Gender Equity policies and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes that occurs whilst women are denied access to leadership positions and men are encouraged to leave the classroom to fill them.
- 9.2 The reports *Building the Foundations of the Future* (1999) and *TAFE Teachers: Facing the Challenge* (2001) show that women are less likely than men to apply for promotion, and therefore more males obtain leadership positions in schools and TAFE institutions. According to these reports work overload, stress and family responsibilities are the three main reasons that prevent women from applying for a promotional position.
- 9.3 The AEU Federal Executive therefore calls on the AEU and its Branches and Associated Bodies to place Gender Equity firmly on their agenda as a union issue and to pressure for change within institutions to overcome the gender inequities currently present.
 - 9.3.1 As part of this commitment AEU Branches and Associated bodies should continue to raise with all state and territory education authorities the position of women in the teaching workforce and the gender segmentation of promotional positions.

- 9.3.2 The AEU recommends that when raising the question of the position of women educators with all state and territory education authorities, Branches and Associated bodies seek a commitment that each education system will develop and establish accountability mechanisms. These mechanisms should measure the current status of women educators and also monitor any improvements for women educators.
- 9.3.3 The AEU demands that state and territory education and training authorities monitor and maintain current and accurate records of the gender profile of the education workforce and that they make these records publicly available. The AEU will maintain an annual national compilation of such records.