

Australian Education Union

**Policy on Principles of Commonwealth
and State/Territory Relations in Schools**

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Policy on Principles of Commonwealth and State/Territory Relations in Schools

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Policy on Principles of Commonwealth and State/Territory Relations in Schools

(To be considered in conjunction with the Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in Australia)

1. All students within Australia have a right to high quality public education regardless of geographic location, gender, socio economic status, social circumstances, cultural background or special needs.
2. Students attending school in one state/territory jurisdiction should not be disadvantaged by the nature or content of that schooling if they later seek to live, be educated, and/or work in another.
3. The inter-governmental arrangements should:
 - be based on an acceptance of '*public first*' to ensure implementation of governments' primary obligation to the maintenance and improvement of a universal public system of education;
 - whilst non government schools continue to be publicly funded, make explicit jurisdictional or government responsibility for planning, funding and accountability including minimising any negative impact on government schooling provision.
4. The states/territories have by tradition exercised constitutional responsibility for schools and are the managers of the government schools systems.

They have a particular responsibility to:

- ensure that the provision of physical and human resources of the highest quality are equally accessible to all children/students regardless of parents capacity to pay;
- ensure that the curriculum is of the highest standard and relevancy;
- promote equality of educational opportunities for individuals and equality of outcomes for groups (for example across gender, social class and ethnic and cultural groups);
- work collaboratively with other states/territories and the Commonwealth in the national interest.

5. The Commonwealth has the constitutional capacity and the moral responsibility to play a leadership role to ensure that schooling in Australia:
- meets the social, cultural and economic needs of the nation;
 - promotes equality of educational opportunities for individuals and equality of outcomes for groups (social, cultural and gender) in Australia;
 - is supported by high quality teacher education including pre-service, induction and continuous development.

It has a responsibility to monitor and assist in the coordination of state/territory effort in education and ensure that school funding in Australia is at least at the OECD average.

It must meet its constitutional responsibility to ensure that the schooling of Australia's indigenous peoples' meets their special needs.

6. These dual responsibilities are best carried out through a partnership that is based on negotiated common objectives.

COAG/MCEETYA should become the principal forums for Commonwealth and state/territory negotiations on national policy on schooling, funding allocations, national targets and the reporting of outcomes.

However, as they are currently constituted these forums are removed from democratic and consultative processes. They should therefore:

- publish agendas and outcomes widely in relevant communities;
- establish a Schools Advisory Council as the principal forum for advice on national schooling policy. This body should be broadly representative and have the capacity to access independent research support.

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Position Arising

Literacy Vouchers (Tutorial Voucher Initiative)

The AEU believes that the Australian Government Tutorial Voucher Initiative is a poor use of public money because:

- The best way to improve literacy outcomes is through increasing direct funding to schools for literacy programs in cooperation with the relevant state or territory authority.
- The Initiative is too closely tied to performance in the Basic Skills Tests, only concentrates on the cognitive aspects of literacy, and ignores the years between these tests.
- It provides short term intervention of minimal quality with no relation to what has gone before or will go on afterwards in the school setting.
- It permits persons who are not fully qualified teachers to undertake the task of teaching literacy to those already experiencing difficulty.
- It is creating an unnecessary and wasteful administrative process.

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Position Arising

Australian Technical Colleges

The AEU believes that the creation of Australian Technical Colleges is unnecessary and that the money would be better spent in supporting existing public education including TAFE and VET in Schools.

The creation of ATCs represent dangerous experimentation with students, both those enrolled in ATCs and surrounding schools.

ATCs will:

- Be deleterious to other schools and TAFEs in their area.
- Duplicate and undermine existing provision of VET.
- Be selective rather than available to all.
- Not solve the skills shortage.
- Undermine unions and teachers' rights to common working conditions.
- Further privatise the provision of education.
- Create shifts in enrolment patterns which could undermine the capacity of schools to offer a comprehensive curriculum.

Initiatives by the Australian Government in schools should be coordinated with state or territory school authorities who have the major constitutional responsibility for running schools.

Branches and Associated Bodies will consider and negotiate with state governments the extent to which ATCs are incorporated into state or territory systems, including working conditions.

The AEU will seek to maintain coverage of members in ATCs.

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Position Arising

Infrastructure Funding

The AEU believes that the Australian Government should work in partnership with state and territory governments to improve the infrastructure of public schools. Any infrastructure funding is best provided through and in consultation with state or territory governments.

The AEU therefore believes that state or territory governments should seek to coordinate and prioritise application by their respective schools.

In any case the AEU encourages all schools to identify their needs and apply for relevant infrastructure funding.

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Position Arising

Accountability Mechanisms

Additional Accountability Requirements in the Schools Assistance Act 2005

The AEU believes it is inappropriate to pre-emptively include such recommendations as a condition of funding to the states and territories. The Australian Government should work in partnership with the states and territories not impose policy through legislation. The AEU endorses Recommendation 7 of the Senate Inquiry into the Bill before it was enacted, which reads:

“The committee recommends that, pending discussions with state and territory governments through normal MCEETYA processes, the Government should be mindful of the rights of states and territories to legislative and administrative autonomy with regard to the operation of schools. The Government should not use school funding legislation as a vehicle to impose on the states and territories policies and practices that would normally be the subject of agreement through MCEETYA.”

In addition, the AEU notes many of these provisions would be undesirable regardless of the process by which they were implemented. It will continue to resist and argue against reporting measures which it regards as against the best interests of public schools and students, and believes that matters such as the method of appointment of staff are matters for negotiation between employers and the relevant Branch or Associated Body not matters for Australian Government legislation.

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