

# Standards not stunts

Education quality and standards should drive career reform, not political stunts by Minister Bishop.

**KRISTA MOGENSEN** reports.

**T**he Federal Education Minister's call to introduce performance pay for teachers and tie federal funding to its implementation is grabbing headlines. Talk to educators, academics and union leaders, however, and so-called 'merit-based' pay is variously described as a failure or a political stunt.

ACTU president Sharan Burrow says it's a smokescreen to cover up for 10 years of government neglect of public education and it's a

stepping stone to introducing individual workplace contracts that will pit teacher against teacher.

AEU federal industrial officer Rob Durbridge says the idea is not designed to be implemented. "Merit-based pay systems often collapse within six months to two years," he says. "This is a wedge designed to isolate teacher unions and make us look as though we're not interested in standards or quality teaching."

In the United States, performance-based pay systems have been largely discredited, says Stephen Dinham, professor

## Briefly

- **The federal government wants a performance-based pay system for teachers.**
- **Critics say the idea doesn't work and it's politically motivated.**
- **Such merit-based systems have failed in other countries.**

of educational leadership and pedagogy at the University of Wollongong. "'Merit pay' rolls off the tongue fairly easily," he says. "It's when you try and define 'performance', to measure it, and try and work out what the rewards might be, that you really get into a bind. The devil's in the detail."

**It's an inconvenient truth for the Federal Education Minister...but she's 15 years out of date.**

## Scots on 'twin track'

The standards-related pay system Scotland introduced for teachers six years ago has been highly successful. Experienced teachers are able to keep teaching, while improved salaries and career structures help attract and retain new teachers.

"Up to the 2001 agreement, the only way for teachers to advance their careers was to stop doing what they were great at doing," says Ronnie Smith, the Educational Institute of Scotland's general secretary.

A 'twin track' professional development program now enables accomplished classroom teachers to embark on a master's degree. The 12-module degree is undertaken through an accredited education provider (mostly universities) at a pace set by the teacher, and it's available through distance learning.

Teachers move forward one salary point in a total of six salary points when they successfully complete every two modules. On completion, the degree delivers a pay advantage of around £7k per annum and professional recognition as a 'chartered teacher'.

The program also recognises prior learning and experience, which can reduce the study period. "We had a number of teachers who had experience or education who we felt ought not to go through all the hoops because to some extent they had been through them," says Smith.

There are no quotas limiting the number of chartered teachers, and teachers themselves pay the course fees. The granting or withholding of chartered teacher status rests with the independent teaching council. "We didn't want patronage of any kind," says



**Mary Bluett**  
AEU Victorian  
branch president

Dinham says the answer is to set aside teaching's archaic lock-step salary structure and adopt an external performance standards framework that recognises professional development and achievement. "This is where teaching standards come in and they need to be rigorous, relevant and based on the real work of teaching—not just a narrow measure like examination results."

### **Bishop's out of date**

A snapshot of teaching pay practice around the world (see box) confirms that, if you want a successful system, high rates of teacher retention and to be able to attract new people to the profession, a standards-based pay system is the way to go.

Teaching standards already exist in most states and territories around Australia that have drawn

on the work of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). They are being further developed by teacher unions as part of enterprise bargaining agreements and also by organisations such as the NSW Institute of Teachers.

Precisely how standards link in

☺☺ **...it's a stepping stone to introducing individual workplace contracts that will pit teacher against teacher.** ☹☹

with salary structures is being negotiated state by state. One thing is certain: the industrial model that has seen teachers stuck on the same salary band for 20 years is being replaced by a standards-based approach with an extended incremental range. "It's an inconvenient truth for the Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop," says AEU Victorian

Branch president Mary Bluett, "but she's 15 years out of date."

### **Confirmed commitment**

At its annual conference in January, the AEU confirmed its commitment to teaching standards. "We're prepared to negotiate agreements which properly recognise and reward quality teaching," says Angelo Gavrielatos, AEU deputy federal president.

The AEU believes teaching standards appropriate to various career stages can form a useful basis for the development of quality teaching, with certain provisions, as outlined in the Quality Teaching in Schools Policy adopted at the conference.

The policy says the standards must be developed by the teaching profession and reflect the complex work professionals do in educational settings. They must be embedded in industrial or formal agreements between employers and teacher unions, and used to guide professional learning—not used punitively for performance management. They must also be used voluntarily at the advanced level. ●

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## **ACER report: Gone missing**

The Federal Minister announced that ACER-commissioned research would show the benefits of performance pay in practice overseas. However, researcher Lawrence Ingarvarson told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that his research showed no such thing and warned against simplistic performance pay schemes.

Journalists were also told that the University of Arkansas had recently completed a study about a successful scheme. However, Background Briefing discovered that the research was highly dubious and funded by the Waltons, Arkansas' richest family (owners of Wal-mart) who campaigned for performance pay for teachers.

Smith. "We wanted independent, objective and external assessment that would give a sense of professionalism."

The program is not without its critics. The fee system is seen as a deterrent, although supporters say there is merit in teachers keeping control of if, and when, they take up the course. A chartered teacher may now command a salary above that of their manager or department head, which has also proved challenging.

"It's been a difficult concept to bed down," says Smith, "because some people think you need more duties for more money." But, overall, it's a winner for Scottish teachers, says Smith. "It's regarded as one of the real success stories of the agreement."