

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION

SUBMISSION TO

**THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION,
TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS**

**TO THE REVIEW OF THE COMMON AND AGREED
NATIONAL GOALS FOR SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA**

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The Australian Education Union (AEU), as the union representing teachers and other education workers in government schools, is pleased to respond to this Discussion Paper.

The AEU believes that it is important that Australia have a set of common and agreed goals in schooling and that the process whereby they are developed should encourage a view amongst educators that they are an important and substantive statement of intent and that they are “owned” by all educators.

It was regrettable that the earlier version was developed by a top down process which presented them to teachers and educators, and that consequently they were not perceived as having important substance by them. The AEU is pleased to see that as part of this review of the goals there is a lengthy period of consultation and discussion, is pleased to be part of this, will encourage and facilitate membership participation in this discussion, and hopes that as result the Goals will be seen as an important statement of national aspiration in schooling.

Nevertheless, the AEU must express its disappointment with the Goals as they currently stand. There is a lack of overall consistency and comprehensiveness. The goals as a whole need considerably more development, and the AEU suggests that a few cosmetic changes will not be sufficient to make them the important document they should become.

In particular this comment applies to the Preamble and to the issue of the overall consistency and comprehensiveness of the document raised at 4.3 to 4.5 below.

This has made it difficult to give definitive comment at this stage. The submission therefore makes comments that are both general and require fundamental change and comments on specific wording and issues.

The AEU believes that a second draft should be circulated after the major problems have been addressed.

In addressing the discussion paper, this submission will first make some introductory comments about the change from the old document to the new one, will then consider each section of the new goals in turn, based upon the layout supplied on the blue sheets by DEETYA at the seminars, and will then comment on Targets and future action.

1 Introduction

1.1 The major change between the two documents is an attempt to have a “sharper focus on students and their learning outcomes”. This transition has not worked well to this stage, and there needs to be further work if it is not to result in the loss of some valuable points and cause considerable alteration to the tone and purpose of the Goals. In particular, the AEU is concerned that the transition has:

- removed the notion of education as a student entitlement
- cast governments as the auditors rather than the ones with prime responsibility
- set goals as a series of hurdles which students must jump over.

- makes it look as though education is something which is “done” to individuals. The goals as written have a “student as object” attitude.

As one of our number described it, “Whilst the former goals had students at its heart, the new seems more concerned with the needs of private enterprise, the successful nation and globalisation.” (Charles Smith, “Not So Common Goals”, The AEU (Vic) News, July 9, 1998, p.17)

- 1.2 In this regard, it is worth noting that there is little in the discussion paper that goes to the purpose of the goals. This would seem a worthwhile discussion. Unless the Goals provide some inspiration, something which can capture the hearts and minds of educators and the community, there would seem to be little point in developing them.

If, as was suggested at the DEETYA Seminar, they are intended to be valid for ten years, there is need for them to be far more visionary and less rooted in today’s debates and jargon.

- 1.3 The AEU is aware that writing in outcomes based language is the current vogue, and accepts that it is therefore inevitable that documents emanating from governments will jump on this bandwagon. This should not, however, be an excuse for precluding from the document some sense of a vision for Australian schooling, some sense that the goals are a states person like view of a desirable future for both the individual and society, not just the economy. There is a basic lack of forward looking philosophy, a sense that as a nation we are setting ourselves some ideals to pursue that will lead to a better Australian society and a better and more rewarding life for each of its citizens.

- 1.4 The goals should also represent a commitment by the governments of Australia to their young. They should show that these governments have an awareness of their responsibility to provide education of the highest quality possible and a firm intention to meet this obligation.

- 1.5 Whilst it may currently be possible to suggest that there are “broader trends in government management reform worldwide, as governments shift from input-based planning and budgeting to planning based on outputs/outcomes”(p. 3), it is already clear that the community is not going to be prepared to allow governments to so easily evade their responsibilities for long.

The following extract from a draft of a forthcoming AEU publication on Educational Resource Guarantees captures the way this debate is moving:

Only by tying the goals to resource guarantees can we be sure that governments will have provided the means to reach these goals and benchmarks.

Successive governments at both Commonwealth and State level have spared no expense in enquiring into various aspects of education and in developing grand vision statements and elaborate lists of goals and objectives.

Unfortunately, this enthusiasm has not been extended to the much more important activity of providing appropriate resources to the schools which are expected to realize these grand visions and deliver the expected outcomes.

Two recent reports from the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee (Not a Level Playground and A Class Act:.) have recognised this and recommended that:

The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments jointly establish a Schools Education Costs Committee to undertake consultation and research with the aim of ascertaining the cost of delivering, at the various stages of schooling and in each of the Eight Key Learning Areas, an education which will meet the basic requirements of those Key Learning Areas and the National Goals of Schooling and on the basis of such data and information determine overall resource levels, allocative mechanisms and the relative funding shares of the various governments” (SOT Report, p.2)

Recent debates on standards, such as those that have been concerned with literacy, and even some government documents, have given the impression that standards and resources are alternative approaches to education targets. A recent DEETYA publication, (Schools Funding: Consultation Report) suggests that once resources reach an adequate level, their link with standards becomes tenuous (p. 7). In fact, of course, inputs and outputs are two sides of the same coin. It makes no more sense to specify goals without considering resources than to specify only inputs.

A rational modern approach to education will therefore specify not just inputs and not just outputs, but both the outcomes expected and the inputs which will underpin their achievement.

It is therefore imperative that the goals be underpinned by a set of resource guarantees which show how governments intend to assist educators meet the goals.

- 1.6 Without such a view, commitment, and forward looking caring attitude the Goals are unlikely to act as an inspiration to educators or to become more than a largely irrelevant document.
- 1.7 Schooling is also a process, and this needs greater acknowledgement. There is little or no mention of teaching and learning as an activity.
- 1.8 Assessment and reporting and its place within the process should probably be included. This would provide an opportunity to place them in the context of schooling overall in a way which showed a correct balance between this aspect and other aspects of schooling.
- 1.9 The AEU notes the proposal that there be a “consolidated goals and targets statement” (p.1). The AEU would go even further. The goals should be underpinned both by a Curriculum Framework (such as the Statements and Profiles) and an Educational Resources Guarantee as outlined in 1.4.

Therefore the AEU sees the goals as only the frontispiece of a consolidated national document of commitment to public schooling.

1.10 There are also a number of matters which have not been transferred from the previous document or which have been transferred in a way which is inadequate. Such matters include:

- care for the natural environment
- special learning needs
- gender
- health and well being
- world of work
- education for democratic participation

Proposed changes which incorporate these have been included where appropriate.

2. The Preamble

2.1 Many of the comments in 1) above should be addressed in the Preamble, which needs to become a much more considered and inspiring section.

2.2 As it stands, the Preamble is an inadequate situational analysis of the current context of Australian schooling. It over emphasises economic considerations and under plays personal, environmental, social and democratic considerations.

2.3 The document should start with the rights of the child to quality schooling, and the commitment of governments to meet their responsibility to provide this. This opening statement should show that the governments are committing themselves to the best possible education for the children of Australia.

2.4 Education first serves the social , cultural and personal needs of the student (including the political and vocational). The fact that this is also in the economic interests of the nation is fortuitous and makes it sensible to fulfill the responsibility, but is not the first rationale for schooling.

2.5 Therefore, in terms of what is there the fourth paragraph (which begins ... “Our World Class ...”) is a better starting point, although of itself far from enough.

2.6 There should be a statement that Australian schooling will build upon the diverse nature of Australian society, and seek to build a socially cohesive society which celebrates that diversity.

2.7 Reference should be made to the gender segregated nature of the Australian workforce by comparison with other OECD countries, and the need for this to be addressed through the schooling system.

- 2.8 Much of what is at the end of the document (The National Goals for Schooling provide a basis.....) is better incorporated into this preamble.
- 2.9 The statement on teachers in this latter section (Strengthen the status and quality of the teaching profession) is the only statement dealing with educators, and as such looks out of place. It also suggests that there is a problem with the current quality.

A preferred alternative set of words is :

Ensure a high status and well rewarded quality teaching profession, supported by good professional development and curriculum resources.

- 2.10 There should be much fuller consideration of teaching and learning as a process.
- 2.11 The phrase “the opportunities that globalisation presents to schooling” should be changed to read “effectively respond to globalisation”.
- 2.12 Jargonistic phrases such as “Our world class...” should be avoided. Such phrases are already becoming cliched and will seriously date the document well within ten years.

3. The “student” goals.

- 3.1 The difficulty of writing everything in terms of student outcomes is most apparent in this section.

There is a considerable difference between expressing a set of values which schooling is seeking to convey, or opportunities it is intending to provide, and expressing these values as a set of outcomes which each student will have. As a result, too much of this section reads as though schooling is a process of forcing students to adopt the values desirable for a competitive economy.

Phrases such as “a commitment to personal excellence” and “positive attitudes towards vocational education” may provide reasonable objectives for schooling as a whole, but the implication that any student failing to manifest such values is a failure must be rejected.

A teacher’s first commitment is to the students they teach. Not all students will adopt all the values that a society considers desirable. Teachers must allow students to be different, to disagree, and ultimately to find their own values. Expressing values as individual student outcomes reads like indoctrination, and suggests that some students are to be more valued than others.

It is therefore desirable that the words “students should” be changed to “students should be provided with the opportunity to”.

- 3.2 This would still not overcome a problem with “a commitment to personal excellence”. This is culturally bound, indicates a preference for individualism over collectivism, and should be removed.

3.3 Similarly “optimism” is a personal trait and a result of life experiences rather than a value, and should also be omitted.

3.4 Conversely, it would seem reasonable to include a commitment to a diverse and cohesive Australian society, and to develop the capacity to work collaboratively.

3.5 In the light of the omissions noted in 1) above the AEU believes this section should also include:

Schooling will enable young Australians to effectively participate in a democratic and just local, national, and global society

and that Goals 9 and 10 in the former version, dealing with “the physical development and personal health and fitness of students, and for the creative use of leisure time”, and “appropriate career education and knowledge of the world of work, including an understanding of the nature and place of work in our society” should be explicitly included here.

3.6 The latter part of the second dot point should be put under a separate dot point to read:

“be prepared for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members;”

4. The “Curriculum” Goals

4.1 It is better to express the point about literacy and numeracy first, and to then relate it as a foundation to the eight KLA’s.

4.2 The definition of Literacy that is given is very confining. There is a need for a broader definition, and one that includes the growing need for competency in computer or cyber literacy, or indeed multi-literacies.

4.3 The list of values at the third dot point is extremely narrow, and it would suggest somewhat limited ambitions for Australian schooling. There is, for instance, no mention of the intellectual, social, aesthetic, creative, moral, spiritual, emotional or physical dimensions. There is no desire to attempt to develop an understanding of the natural environment, or of cultural understanding.

It views students purely as future workers, and of workers in a world of unstable and precarious employment at that.

4.4 Although it may be argued that some of these are included in the previous section, there is no clear rationale for the division between the “talents and capacities” in the above section and the “skills” in this section.

It would seem that if this structure is to be adhered to, it is necessary to duplicate ideas rather than suggest that some things will not be part of the curriculum, and there is a need for much greater consideration of the totality of the curriculum.

Alternatively, it may be preferable not to separate them into two sections, but to put this point back into the previous section.

- 4.5 In either case, the list lacks comprehensiveness and the Goals appear as a grab bag of what some people think is under emphasised or missing from the current situation rather than a document which addresses what schooling should be about.
- 4.6 Civics and citizenship should be included as an overarching, cross curricular focus.
- 4.7 Similarly, the curriculum area should include a statement to the effect that students should be encouraged, through a supportive school environment, to develop social and behavioural skills which will enable them to work towards a society free from discrimination, racism and violence.
- 4.8 “Enterprising” is another current buzz word which will lose its novelty and be further developed as a concept over the next ten years. Its meaning is currently confused. Therefore its prominence in this statement is misplaced.

5. The “Social Justice” Goals

- 5.1 The first dot point should be changed to read “disadvantaged students have equitable access and participation and that outcomes for educationally disadvantaged groups match those of other students”
- 5.2 The second dot point should similarly say “Equitable access and participation designed to ensure equality of outcomes”.
- 5.3 The following point should be added as it has not been adequately carried over from the old document:

“that students with special learning requirements reach their full potential”.

- 5.4 The absence of any reference to Gender in the document is a serious omission. Therefore the following should be included:

“the differential needs of girls and boys are met equitably and outcomes for these groups are equal”.

5. The School Community and Environment

- 6.1 This should be incorporated into the preamble as mentioned above.

7. Targets

- 7.1 There appears to be an argument which will be irresistible to some in the current climate that there is a natural sequence of Goals, Targets, and Assessment and Reporting against these

which will then be used to justify more mass standardised testing, international comparisons and so on.

The AEU rejects such a line of argument.

- 7.2 It is noted that the targets as modelled in the booklet do not do this, and in fact set targets which impact on government provision. As such, they do suggest that the setting of targets may be worthwhile. The AEU would support such targets.
- 7.3 Nevertheless, there is a mis-match between the goals and the targets as a result of them being developed through separate and uncoordinated processes. Whilst useful for illustrative purposes, there is probably a need to develop targets more specifically related to and arising from the goals.
- 7.4 The resource implications of targets should also be explicitly addressed in the Resource Guarantees section.
- 7.5 There is also an argument that future projects and taskforces which develop targets should develop them in way that relates them to the Goals.
- 7.6 The actual targets themselves are very important and the AEU would expect a further round of consultations on the targets when they have been further developed.

Conclusion

Whilst the AEU appreciates this opportunity for consultation and the efforts that are being made for wider consultations in relation to this version of the Goals, it is of the view that there are a number of key issues in need of resolution before they can proceed.

In particular, there is need to more clearly define and explain their purpose.

If, as the AEU would expect, this identified the need for them to be understood and embraced by a wide cross section of the teaching force and the community, then it may well be necessary for the process to be further lengthened in order to ensure the direct involvement of classroom practitioners, educators and the community more broadly. The AEU would be pleased to assist in this process.

It is the view of the AEU that this draft of the goals needs to be further developed along the lines suggested and taking into consideration comments from other groups before there are more consultations.

The following is the resolution in relation to the Goals passed by the AEU Federal Executive at its September meeting:

That the AEU declares that it's involvement and support for the development of the National Goals of Schooling is contingent upon a serious allocation of resources which are guaranteed and integrated into input targets.

The AEU insists that it be consulted prior to the adoption of any specific targets and that the AEU strongly object to the imposition of outcomes expectations until public funding levels and resource guarantees are addressed.

That the AEU reinforce its call for the inclusion of resource guarantees and appropriate goals for special needs students.

If, as seems likely, only minor changes are made in order that the process can be completed in a short time frame, then it is likely that the new goals will follow the same course as the old ones and become an interesting but largely irrelevant statement of national intent which does not really engage with those who are actually responsible for delivering schooling to students.

This would be a wasted opportunity.