Australian Education Union

Submission to

Creating Parity – The Forrest Review

September 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents more than 190,000 educator members employed in the public early childhood, primary, secondary and TAFE sectors throughout Australia.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the recommendations made in the final report of the Forrest Review: Creating Parity.

The AEU is committed to a long term, intergenerational, aspirational plan for Indigenous Australians, informed by a belief in the importance of setting high expectations for future generations of Indigenous students.

Commencing with strategies and actions focusing on early childhood and those working with mothers from the conception of their child, through primary and secondary schooling and into the post-compulsory sector, we believe in programs and support to progressively improve outcomes over an intergenerational (25 year) time period. Only with genuine commitment to a realistic long term, intergenerational time frame will acceptable outcomes eventually be achieved.

AEU policy demonstrates a long-standing commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Our 2009 policy “The Needs of Indigenous Students and their Communities” reflects an understanding of the particular circumstances of Indigenous students and the need for a range of options and flexible responses to ensure that public education meets the needs of Indigenous students. A copy of that policy statement is attached to this document. We believe that the Commonwealth Government should consider the proposals in the policy as it formulates a response to Creating Parity.

We recognise that the Creating Parity report and recommendations have gone well beyond the initial Terms of Reference set by the Federal Government and potentially have significant ramifications for our members in early childhood, school and TAFE settings particularly in regional and remote locations. While our submission will focus on the recommendations that will impact directly on the AEU and the work of its members, we are deeply concerned for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, given that the Forrest Review considers welfare support as a “cash barbecue” and that punitive short-sighted measures are the answer to complex long-term issues.

Chapter 1

The AEU supports the position that education is a key to success for future learning, employment and prosperity. Despite concerns that much of the commentary around recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 4 are “motherhood” statements, we support their general thrust, but have significant concerns about the implementation strategies that go to achieving them.

The Forrest Review refers to and uses interchangeably the terms “explicit instruction” and Direct Instruction. It needs to be made clear that they are not one and the same, and that the AEU unequivocally opposes the scripted, sequenced and imported method of Direct Instruction. DI has been strongly critiqued by educational researchers including Professor
Allan Luke¹ and the Australian Council for Educational Research² and found to be lacking in curriculum and pedagogical terms. It is not a universal solution to literacy and numeracy outcomes.

However the AEU does support “explicit instruction” as a useful tool in the repertoire of teaching methods used by high quality classroom practitioners. This method of instruction involves directing student attention toward specific learning, occurs in a highly structured environment, and focuses on producing specific learning outcomes.

The success story of Challis Early Childhood Education Centre³ is noted. The AEU applauds the Centre’s work and outcomes. However, it should be noted that Challis Primary School will be losing significant funding from 2015 due to the cuts to education funding by the WA Government, which may impact on the Challis ECEC as the two entities are linked. The expected funding shortfall is exacerbated by the fact that the WA Government did not enter into an agreement with the Commonwealth to support, fund and implement the needs-based Gonski funding model. It is critical that Commonwealth Government funding for schools to all states and territories is tied to conditions which require states to maintain and grow their financial commitment to school education and use the additional Commonwealth Gonski funding to achieve the objective of addressing disadvantage in order to improve learning outcomes for all students.

The AEU is strongly opposed to attendance strategies that advocate for punitive financial measures for parents and families on welfare support, and the naming and shaming of schools and communities on public websites. Recent findings from Dr Nick Biddle of the Australian National University show that:

... children who live in families on income support are only marginally less likely to attend school than those from families whose main source of income is wages and salaries; this difference is not statistically significant.⁴

We know that it is the positive relationship between the parents, community and school that is a key element in getting students to school and maintaining their attendance while supporting them to achieve learning outcomes, rather than the “big stick” approach.

The AEU is unequivocally opposed to any recommendation that schools be funded on attendance rather than enrolment. The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction which resources schools on attendance rather than enrolment. The AEU asserts that this funding arrangement creates a cycle of understaffing, overcrowded classrooms, educational programs not targeted to the learning needs of individual students, disengagement of those students, and non-attendance. Because the funding is adjusted at the beginning of each term based on the attendance of the previous term, there is constant pressure on resources and staffing as schools try to address the challenges associated with students’ learning. The term by term

¹ http://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=439
² http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=indigenous_education
³ Creating Parity – The Forrest Review p 77
⁴ Developing a Behavioural Model of School Attendance: Policy Implications for Indigenous Children and Youth 2014; p20
uncertainty and fluctuations of resources and staffing to appropriately address student needs, especially when efforts to improve attendance achieve success, result in students again becoming disengaged and ceasing to attend.

This is a deficit model of funding. Schools need to be resourced in the expectation that all students will attend. The NT model of resourcing schools is clearly designed to save money by reducing budgets each term in the hope that students will not attend. Furthermore, the cycle of term-based funding has significant implications for local employment, and for access to - and continuity of - high quality teachers and teaching programs. This is particularly so in remote and rural communities.

We are deeply concerned about the references to an “enforceable plan” for schools. What this plan may entail, what support is available for schools and the ramifications for those schools that do not meet the requirements of the “enforceable plan” are not included in the report.

The AEU continues to oppose the Teach for Australia program which has been found to be an expensive system, with - at best - questionable outcomes in providing and retaining high quality teachers. The 2013 ACER Phase 3 evaluation report found that the program has an attrition rate of around 50% after two years, that TFA Associates needed more time observing and practising teaching and that:

They face a very steep learning curve as they develop their teaching persona, their relationship with students, an understanding of school policies and procedures and of administrative tasks, such as report writing, that are part of the job and about which they have limited knowledge.\(^5\)

To place unqualified and under-experienced TFA Associates in classrooms with students who need individualised learning programs and into communities with little or no awareness or experience of the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and languages, is at best a disservice to all those involved. To recommend the use of Teach for Australia Associates contradicts the assertions made later in the same chapter, which states:

All too often, we send the least experienced... teachers to work with students who have the greatest needs. It is not uncommon for teachers fresh from university, with little experience of working with first Australian communities, to be sent to remote first Australian schools. More often than not, these new teachers are inadequately prepared for the challenges that they will face and are given little support to develop the skills and expertise they need to be effective in these tough school environments.\(^6\)

The AEU strongly supports the premise of attracting high quality teachers to work in difficult to staff locations, however we oppose any suggestion of paying teachers based on student attendance or outcomes. Many jurisdictions have a range of incentives in place to attract, maintain and assess high quality teachers, and it is critical that those incentives continue to be negotiated with the AEU at the state and territory level.

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\(^5\) Teach for Australia Pathway: Evaluation Report Phase 3 of 3 2013, p110

\(^6\) Creating Parity – The Forrest Review p95
While we support the notion of peer mentoring, we have concerns about the workload implications for principals in taking on further responsibility cited in Recommendation 9.4 that removes them from their key duty as the educational leader within their school, including taking on the responsibility for advising and liaising with Centrelink.

We are also very concerned that the recommendations and assertions of the Forrest Review are based on, and reference material that is twenty six years old\(^7\). The teaching professional has developed and progressed significantly in that time to meet the needs of students, communities and teachers.

Chapter 5

The AEU categorically rejects any recommendation to replace funding for the TAFE system with vouchers. TAFE is internationally recognised for the high-quality development and delivery of vocational education and remains the pre-eminent provider in Australia. TAFE has developed critical relationships linking industry with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It must continue to be resourced to have a key role in workforce development, and in securing long-term employment and further education outcomes for individuals and communities. Recent experience of voucher-style funding in the VET sector has shown that this approach is ineffective in ensuring high-quality delivery of vocational education, or in linking vocational education with employment outcomes for individual students. High-profile members of the business community\(^8\) have raised significant concerns about voucher funding in the VET sector, in particular in relation to its impact on disadvantaged students and regional communities, and on the capacity of TAFE to continue its vital work in this area.

The AEU has similar concerns, arguing that crude market mechanisms such as voucher funding will undermine the work of the TAFE system in this crucial area, and further disadvantage individuals and communities.

Conclusion

The AEU has significant concerns with many of the *Creating Parity* recommendations and implementation strategies. We urge the Government to give more weight and consideration to the evidence in support of our position in its ongoing review of the *Creating Parity* report.

\(^7\) Mitchell & Peteris’ work from 1988, cited at Note 96, p241


The Needs of Indigenous Students and their Communities

January 2009

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The Australian Education Union can take great pride in its history and traditions in championing the cause of Indigenous students and their communities.

It is quite clear that the state of Indigenous education and the needs of Indigenous students still require urgent attention. Fundamental issues of access and equity have yet to be addressed in many communities.

By any measure, we have a long way to go in order to achieve an equality of learning outcomes for Indigenous students. The plight of our Indigenous students and their communities remains the most pressing human rights issue which confronts us and must be confronted by us.

In accepting our responsibility to deal with the fundamental injustices still apparent among Indigenous students and their communities we must continue our campaigns aimed at achieving an increase in government effort, resources and the promotion of educational opportunities. While there are successful programs being implemented in some places, it must be acknowledged that these successes are usually isolated, short lived and do not have a wider positive impact on the overall system.

The following areas are recognized as key areas for action to improve the outcomes for Indigenous students and their communities.

**Different Educational Structures and Models for the provision of public education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**

The AEU continues to acknowledge that the provision of education to Indigenous students cannot be “more of the same”.

Accordingly, the AEU reiterates the need to consider and develop different structures and models that take into account the needs of Indigenous students and their particular communities. Different communities may need different models. An isolated country community may require a different configuration of structures and approaches than a school in an urban environment.

Of course, the development of any such initiatives would require the prior consultation with and the agreement of local communities. The success of any such approach is reliant upon a shared sense of ownership.

The alternative structures / models may include the following characteristics.

- The establishment of programs operating from schools, involving appropriate government agencies, to support parents and their children aged 0 - 4. This would establish important links between school and community from an early stage.
- The establishment of education complexes delivering pre-school, school and post compulsory education (TAFE).
- The establishment of genuine inter-agency programs operating from schools with significant Indigenous populations, ensuring the school is the centre of community. These programs should be run by departments of Health, Sport and
Recreation and other relevant government departments complementing the work of education departments.

- Without compromising the entitlements of employees, the establishment of extended operational hours and days - up to forty eight (48) weeks per year.

**Staffing Policies.**

With respect to the issue of teacher supply and retention in difficult-to-staff schools, whilst acknowledging the contribution and positive influence of beginning teachers, it is also acknowledged that teacher experience, continuity and stability contribute significantly to improved student outcomes and school development initiatives.

Whilst there is much to be learnt from successful programs the AEU supports the further development and negotiation of new staffing policies aimed at increasing the number of experienced teachers in identified difficult-to-staff schools, increasing leadership density and correspondingly reducing the number of beginning teacher appointments.

Furthermore, new staffing policy should include initiatives that include the early appointment and in-servicing of new teachers including principals who will teach in schools with significant Indigenous enrolments. The appointment of new teachers including principals during the final term of the school year, prior to the new school year, will ensure continuity of programs for students.

Improvements in the recruitment and retention incentives available to classroom teachers, executive teachers and principals serving in geographically isolated, difficult-to-staff schools in Indigenous communities are also required.

Staffing policies must also promote the development and support of local Indigenous teachers and support staff. Apart from serving as positive role models for students which will assist in improving cultural understanding and the learning outcomes for students, such endeavours will serve to increase the capacity of community as a whole.

**New industrial instruments / agreements**

The AEU, together with its Branches and Associated Bodies in each state and territory, indicates its preparedness to negotiate changes aimed at improving the educational well being of Indigenous students. Variations to existing arrangements need to be negotiated and reflected in new/varied Awards/EBAs/Agreements as appropriate.