



# Australian Education Union

## Policy on Gender Equity

As adopted at the 2017 Annual Conference



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# Australian Education Union

## Policy on Gender Equity

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### **1. Scope and Purpose**

- 1.1. The AEU Gender Equity 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.

### **2. Introduction**

- 2.1. The AEU views Gender Equity as part of our work to achieve a more just society. This means understanding the intersection of gender, class, Aboriginality, race, culture, disability and sexuality and how they impact on students, educators and the broader Australian society.
- 2.2. 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 underpins policy.
- 2.3. Gender is socially constructed while sex is consigned at birth.
- 2.4. Individuals actively develop a gendered identity through interacting with the myriad messages and practices they encounter in society. Gender differs from one society to another across social classes, ethnic and cultural groups and within the same society over time.
- 2.5. Perceptions of gender shape the range of experiences and opportunities available to our members and the students in public education settings. Many students do not fulfil their potential in education due to gender stereotyping which narrows their opportunities and/or impacts negatively on their schooling, career options and future lives. This can be compounded by the impact of stereotypical assumptions based on class, race, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, culture, disability and sexuality.
- 2.6. Gender responds to social change. The AEU is committed to eradicating practices that entrench historical and constructed views of gender roles which limit the opportunities for our members and for students in our public education settings.
- 2.7. Public education plays an active role in the development of a range of femininities and masculinities through student relationships with teachers, peers, the organisational culture, through curriculum offerings and courses.

- 2.8. Public education 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, women and men individually or as a group. Rather it should occur in the context of understanding and challenging inequality in our society.
- 2.9. The AEU is committed to developing and maintaining ongoing partnerships between Federal and State systems, education settings, parent and community organisations and industry, in the fulfilment of the long term goal of achieving Gender Equity.

### 3. Definitions

- 3.1. **Sex** is assigned at birth based on biological features and is typically categorised as male, female, or intersex.
- 3.2. **Gender** refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a given culture associates with a particular sex. Behaviour that is not compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender non-conforming.
- 3.3. **Gender identity** refers to one's sense of their own gender.
- 3.4. **Transgender**: an umbrella term that refers to people whose physical and/or sexual characteristics may not match their gender identity.
- 3.5. For the purposes of this policy, **Women** refers to all people who identify as women.
- 3.6. **Public education workplaces** refers to all places where the AEU has members.

### 4. Cross Reference

- 4.1. This policy should be considered alongside the following AEU policies:
  - Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Policy 2015
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy 2016

### 5. Subsumes

- 5.1. This policy subsumes the 2008 Policy on Gender Equity

## 6. Gender Based Discrimination

- 6.1. The AEU recognises that girls and women continue to be seriously disadvantaged compared to boys and men in employment and education. The AEU also recognises that this disadvantage intersects with and is compounded by disadvantage related to race, culture, ethnicity, Aboriginality, sexuality, age and disability.
- 6.2. The AEU recognises that people who are gender-diverse are seriously disadvantaged in employment and education.
- 6.3. This disadvantage takes the form of both unconscious bias, that is, internalised beliefs about masculinity and femininity that inadvertently privilege one group over another, but also conscious discrimination, whereby some men and boys use their advantage in the wider society to the disadvantage of women and girls.
- 6.4. Harassment of girls and young women and gender non-conforming students in 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. Supporting the Profession to Practice Gender Equity

### 7.1. Gender Equity Strategies

The AEU believes that the critical factor in achieving Gender Equity is systematic commitment to cultural change. The AEU recognises that the implementation of Gender Equity policies varies from state to state as well as workplace to workplace and too often relies on the commitment of individuals. Therefore, the AEU calls upon federal and state governments to develop comprehensive cross government Gender Equity strategies in consultation with AEU Branches and Associated Bodies. Strategies should include resources and additional funding for their implementation.

- 7.2. The AEU calls on Early Childhood employers, TAFE and Education Departments and schools to develop whole of School Gender Equity strategies which include funding for the development of policies, procedures and plans, resources, training and development and additional release time for teachers.

### 7.3. Pre-service training and Ongoing Professional Development

The AEU believes that knowledge and understanding of Gender Equity are critical in bringing about a culture of change. Pre service education and professional development is essential if staff in education settings are to address the construction of gender and the impact this has on teaching and learning.

- 7.4. The AEU is committed to working with Universities who offer pre-service training to ensure that teachers are given the support that they need to understand the construction of gender, and the ways that this limits the opportunities available for students and leads to gender based discrimination.

- 7.5. The AEU recognises that all teachers require specific pre-service training and ongoing professional development on human relations and sexuality.

## **8. Employment Issues**

- 8.1. The AEU recognises that there are high quality teachers of all genders. There should be no discriminatory recruitment practices on the basis of a perceived lack of male staff in education workplaces.

### Promotion Positions

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 reinforcement of gender stereotypes that occur through disproportionate gender representation in leadership positions.

- 8.2. The AEU's State of our Schools survey (2015) found that women are significantly less likely than men to apply for promotion. According to the survey, work overload and family responsibilities are the main reasons that prevent women from applying for a promotional position.
- 8.3. The AEU will 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.
- 8.4. The AEU demands that state and territory education and training authorities monitor and maintain current, accurate and detailed records of the gender profile and employment modes of all sections of the education workforce and that they make these records publicly available. The AEU will maintain an annual national compilation of such records.

### Workplaces that Support Parents and Families

The AEU believes that to achieve an equitable educational environment there must be system wide training for educational workplace leaders and Education Department staff about gender inclusive practices.

- 8.6. The AEU recognises the right for members and employees to have flexible work environments at all levels of the workforce and the need to provide workplaces that balance the needs of unpaid and paid work so as not to discriminate against women.
- 8.7. The AEU believes that to achieve gender equality in workplaces, workers must be able to access appropriate, high quality and affordable early education and care. Education workplaces must take into account the availability and administrative procedures of these settings when negotiating flexible work arrangements for parents and carers.



## **9. Gender Based Violence**

- 9.1. 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 in public education settings.
- 9.2. The AEU rejects victim blaming and excuses for violence on the basis of perceived differences between girls and boys, women and men.
- 9.3. The AEU supports whole school approaches to identifying and eliminating gendered violence and disruptive behaviours. Gendered violence and disruptive behaviours should never become simply the responsibility of individuals in educational settings.
- 9.4. The AEU recognises that the nature of gender based violence has changed through the emergence of new technologies impacting on the safety of staff and students. Education Departments must have appropriate policies, strategies and professional development to allow staff in education workplaces to respond effectively to new challenges as they emerge.
- 9.5. The AEU recognises that many of its members, particularly its women members, may, at some stage of their lives, be victims of family and domestic violence. Specific groups and communities experience violence differently and therefore strategies for combating violence need to address this difference.
- 9.6. Many of the students that our members work with will be living in homes where family and domestic violence is prevalent.
- 9.7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are significantly more likely to be subjected to family and domestic violence. For example, the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2014), identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than non-Indigenous women.
- 9.8. The AEU is proud to have negotiated Domestic and Family Violence Leave provisions for many of its members. The AEU's position is that a minimum of 10 days of Domestic and Family Violence leave should be included in all Australian Industrial Agreements.
- 9.9. The AEU recognises that sexist language, behaviours and attitudes have a direct relationship with the very high rates of gender based violence in Australia. The AEU commits to working with its members, with schools and school communities, and with state and federal governments to address the factors that contribute to unacceptably high rates of domestic violence in Australia.

## **10. Women in the AEU and Unions**

- 10.1. The AEU is committed to equity between men and women. It therefore commits to ongoing development of its own processes, employment practices and culture to ensure that women are not discriminated against.

- 10.2. The AEU is committed to increasing women's representation and participation at all levels of its structures.
- 10.3. This will occur through the development of Gender Strategies with measurable outcomes and accountability for their implementation.
- 10.4. The AEU through its affiliation with the ACTU and other bodies will work constructively to achieve gender equity and remove barriers to women's active participation and leadership in the broader union movement.
- 10.5. The AEU will encourage the ACTU and State/Territory peak union bodies to take the lead in working with their relevant Governments on Gender Equity Strategies.

## **11. Economic Security for Women**

### **11.1. Gender Pay Gap**

The AEU believes that the current gender pay gap between men and women is unacceptable. We also believe that the causes of the gap are well known.

- 11.2. The AEU calls on all Australian government to actively pursue policy that will eliminate the gender pay gap. This includes: supporting industrial conditions that allow women to balance work with childbirth; supporting and encouraging both men and women to care for children, the elderly and family; ensuring the provision of accessible, affordable, high quality early education and care; and implementing strategies to ensure that women are supported to move into promotions positions within public education settings.

### **11.3. Insecure Work**

The AEU recognises that women are more likely to be employed in insecure casual, or short term contract work. Contract and casual employment serves to entrench disempowered and captive employees and erodes access to hard won industrial conditions. Government must 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.

### **11.4. Retirement Incomes**

The AEU believes that the current imbalance between men's and women's superannuation savings is unacceptable. We call on the Federal Government to implement all of the recommendations of the 2016 Senate Inquiry into Women's Economic Security in Retirements.

## 12. Fees and Income Support

- 12.1. The AEU recognises that many women and girl students suffer financial hardship and are unable to meet educational expenses due to inadequate incomes and increasing costs.
- 12.2. The AEU condemns the increasing burden of fees and student debts for TAFE and Vocational Education and Training in Australia, which are the direct result of cuts in government funding and failed market based funding experiments.
- 12.3. The AEU condemns the increasing creep of fee for service activities into our pre-schools and schools.
- 12.4. The AEU believes, as a matter of principle, and of sound public policy, that the provision of all levels of education, including pre-school and TAFE, should be at no cost to the student.
- 12.5. The AEU calls on Federal governments to immediately implement the full Gonski funding model to ensure that all schools have the resources they need to meet the educational needs of all learners.
- 12.6. The AEU calls on states and federal governments to ensure that TAFE is adequately funded to provide high quality vocational education, support services, and a research capacity to be able to plan for innovation, implement new and emerging technologies and practices; and develop social justice strategies to overcome disadvantage.

## 13. Inclusive Curriculum and Educational Practices

- 13.1. To overcome gender inequalities, educational programs must begin from a foundation which acknowledges that gender-based power imbalances are one of the main drivers of gender inequality, including gender-based violence.

### 13.2. Educational Leadership

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.

### 13.3. Respectful Relationships

The AEU supports the inclusion of specific curriculum initiatives designed to teach students the underlying beliefs and attitudes that lead to gender based discrimination and violence. However, such initiatives must be accompanied by properly resourced whole of workplace strategies that create a culture of equity and model respectful relationships.

13.4. The AEU recognises that effective curriculum development can only occur if teachers are involved in the properly resourced planning, implementation and evaluation of programs. Therefore, proper resourcing for such curriculum initiatives includes training for teachers, appropriate resources and time release for teachers and other staff, provision of school and TAFE counsellors and training and support for educational workplace leaders to implement whole of workplace approaches.

13.5. A whole of workplace response recognises that many AEU members may themselves have experienced family and domestic violence, and will need support to deliver these programs including the opportunity to opt out if they choose.

13.6. Targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs

The AEU identifies that programs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are currently either non-existent in parts of the country or are under-resourced. We call on State, Territory and Federal Governments to commit to research based, high quality targeted programs.

13.7. Debates on Boys and Girls Education

For some commentators, the boys' education agenda provides a conduit for anti-feminist beliefs. A disturbingly common fallacy is 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.

13.8. The AEU believes such comments are simplistic by nature, defining a whole group of boys in opposition to a whole group of girls. 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 interrogate 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.

13.9. 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.

- 13.10. 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 reveals potentially fruitful strategies because they acknowledge the diverse range of masculinities and femininities that students in public education settings possess.

13.11. Sex and Sexuality Education

The AEU believes that for students there is a need for early, continuous human relations and sexuality education within comprehensive educational programs. See AEU Policy on Sexual Orientation, Gender Diversity and Intersex Policy, 2015

13.12. Pregnant and Parenting Students

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 or denied access.

- 13.13. Therefore, the AEU calls on Education Departments to develop policy aimed at retaining pregnant and parenting students. Policy should provide for government assistance for childcare costs and access to care places, as well as professional development, training and resources for educators to support the needs of pregnant and parenting students.

- 13.14. The AEU also supports flexible approaches to workload, assessment and attendance requirements. Costs related to school 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.

## **14. Career Advice**

- 14.1. The AEU supports the provision of career education within public education workplaces and the community for all students which aims to assist students to realise their potential without being subjected to gender biased information concerning employment.
- 14.2. The AEU believes 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 and course choices.
- 14.3. 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 school.

- 14.4. The AEU recognises that vocational education is an important part of the education of girls and that the development of gender inclusive vocational advice and counselling is an imperative.
- 14.5. The AEU condemns cuts by successive Australian state and federal governments to TAFE budgets which has led to a dramatic reduction in the availability of high quality vocational advice and counselling.

## **15. Women in TAFE**

- 15.1. The AEU believes that a strong, properly funded, public TAFE system is essential to ensuring women's equal participation and success in employment.
- 15.2. Post-secondary education and training should develop women's capacity for career mobility and the ability to advocate for their rights within the labour market, rather than simply offering a set of narrow skills aimed at gaining work with one employer.
- 15.3. 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.
- 15.4. Priority should also be given to improved planning and resourcing of courses that lead to traditionally low paid, highly feminised industries. These courses should provide learners with a broad range of skills alongside specialist skills in order to advocate and organise within these industries and also to pathway into higher paid work, should they choose.
- 15.5. TAFE is particularly important for women retraining following periods out of the workforce and for 'second chance' learners. Compensatory and access programs including literacy, language, numeracy, English as an Additional Language or Dialect programs, self-esteem programs, bridging programs and programs to assist designated disadvantaged groups must be provided.
- 15.6. The AEU calls on Australian state and territory governments to monitor women's employment participation, particularly in areas / industries that are traditionally male dominated. Women's policy must be visible and targeted, rather than allocated 'general equity' status. The AEU and other relevant unions must be included in decision making and advisory bodies related to vocational education and training. TAFE must be specifically funded to develop strategies that support pathways for women into traditionally male industries.
- 15.7. Policies of successive state and federal governments to privatise Vocational Education and Training have led to higher fees, lower quality, and increased debt for adults attempting to access a vocational education. Further, these negative outcomes have had a disproportionate impact on women.
- 15.8. The AEU condemns the ongoing, systematic defunding of the public TAFE system by state and federal governments.

- 15.9. The AEU supports the continued delivery of VET by qualified, highly skilled, professional teachers, including in the Adult Migrant English Program.

## **16. Apprenticeships and Traineeships**

- 16.1. The AEU recognises that gender disparities in access to apprenticeships have serious flow on effects for the labour market status and incomes of women.
- 16.2. The AEU calls on governments, employers, employer groups and unions to recognise and dispel gender stereotypes and limitations that form barriers to women's participation in traditionally male apprenticeships. The AEU calls on these stakeholders to actively encourage women to take up non-traditional trades and to support women who do so.
- 16.3. The AEU recognises that a great deal of traineeship programs in female dominated industries, have been focused on narrow skill sets, delivered through market based models by low-quality for profit training providers. Further, many of these traineeships have provided little opportunity for secure ongoing employment or pathways into better paid work for women.
- 16.4. 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 settings and women with disabilities. Government departments should lead the way in this process.

## **17. Adult and Community Education**

- 17.1. 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 and women identified 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.

## **18. Educational rights of Women and Girls and Women and Girls Identified**

- 18.1. While the AEU believes that supporting Gender Equity in education is beneficial to all, we specifically draw attention to the educational rights of women and girls as a fundamental human right, because it is not currently universally accessible.
- 18.2. 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."

- 18.3. The AEU supports the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4; Quality Education and Goal 5, Gender Equality, noting that achieving "free, equitable and quality education" as described in Goal 4, is essential to achieving Gender Equality.
- 18.4. The AEU rejects private low fee schools, run by multi-national edu-businesses as an acceptable model for achieving universal primary education.
- 18.5. In Australia, whilst access to education on the basis of gender is not as significant an issue, there remain gender based disparities in quality of education, access to teacher time and physical resources and access to a wide range of subjects and curriculum that lead to equitable employment outcomes.
- 18.6. Therefore, 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.