

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A RESEARCH BASE

That HREOC provide to the government and the community, comprehensive and documented evidence from its consultations of the increasingly institutionalised discrimination in the provision of education and training to rural and remote communities in Australia.

A number of important research reports have been published recently (e.g. *Learning Lessons - An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*; The Dusseldorp Skills Forum's *The Cost to Australia of Early School Leaving* and *Why Australia Needs a National Youth Commitment*) which demonstrate and support the findings from the IEU's consultations with members and those evident in HREOC's documentation of its consultations on its web site. **The IEU recommends that an audit be undertaken of the plethora of recently published research and literature (much of it government funded).**

Such an audit should also include an examination of what is happening in other countries, such as for example, New Zealand and Canada, where considerable work has been done by and with indigenous communities in relation to policies of self actualisation and self determination, the rights of indigenous workers, the rights of indigenous children, and the democratisation of the reconciliation process. This research and the recommendations arising therefrom should become the research base to inform the development and implementation of policy to redress the discrimination and inequity in rural and remote Australia.

2. A WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH

That HREOC recommend the development of a comprehensive whole of government strategy to redress the already high and increasing levels of social, economic and educational disadvantage and discrimination in the provision of education and training opportunities to rural and regional communities.

The spirit has gone out of many of these communities and the people feel defeated. The IEU's consultations with members indicates that Australia's rural communities need to have much of their infrastructure rebuilt and their services re established in order for the confidence and sense of community to be restored and for them to again have some sense of power over their lives.

The interrelationship and interplay of a community's health and well-being with its education, training and employment opportunities, and the construction of projects, small businesses and similar enterprises cannot be overestimated.

To this end, the Union urges the Commission to recommend the establishment of an intergovernmental Taskforce comprising the range of key policy portfolios (e.g. industry development, regional development, transport, education and training, health, regional development, finance etc) which would be involved in developing integrated policies directed to rebuilding rural and remote communities, and in particular the provision of education and training within

them. The role and structure of such a Taskforce needs to be embedded in the community and to have a knowledge and understanding of the community and its needs.

3. FUNDING

Over the last 10 years there has been a serious decline in overall resource levels for schooling. There is also a widening gap between the rhetoric, proposals for reform and community expectations on the one hand; and on the other, the actual conditions in which teachers and students find themselves - whether in government schools or in the typical non government school, the size of the class, the level and experience of teachers, the teacher workload, the range and depth of the curriculum taught - are governed by the level and distribution of public funding.

Government Policy should reflect the following principles:

- It is in the public and the national interest that there must exist a strong and viable government school system, funded directly by both Commonwealth and State governments.
- It must cater for all children regardless of their wealth and background, including those in small, rural, isolated, poor and disadvantaged communities and NESB and ATSI communities.
- The Australian community expects the government education system to be properly resourced and comprehensive and to set the benchmark or community standard for the provision of education for all students.
- The federal government must have a central leadership role and responsibility in planning and ensuring that both the government and non government school authorities have the capacity and the resources to provide educational services of the highest quality and that rigorous accountability and reporting mechanisms are in place.

The IEU urges HREOC to recommend to the federal government, implementation of the recommendations in the Senate Inquiry report "A Class Act" which calls for the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to 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 For Schooling. On the basis of such data and information, overall resource levels, allocative mechanisms and the relative funding shares of the various governments can be determined. The IEU believes that such a Committee should include representatives from key stakeholders from across the industry and should include representatives from the educational communities of rural and remote Australia.

- The purpose of such national research and consultation is to achieve a school funding system which is equitable, transparent, predictable and responsive to changing demands.
- The "principle of need" should determine the level and distribution of funds and accountability mechanisms of Commonwealth, State and Block Grant Authorities
- The most disadvantaged schools with the greatest levels of need in either sector should receive additional resources targeted to particular teaching and learning programs.
- assessment of what should be included in a comprehensive "basket of resources" to provide quality education to all students. There should be an ongoing review of what the community standard represents, in light of A fair and proper approach to needs based schools funding requires an changes in education policy and priorities and the challenges confronting schools and the elements in the basket should be assigned a proper monetary basis.

4. THE NATURE AND CHANGING ROLE OF EDUCATION

Changes in the structure of families, the cultural plurality of school populations, youth unemployment and the diversification of the labour market and the increasing retention rates in schools have meant that greater responsibility for much of the socialisation and general care of students has fallen onto schools and, in particular, teachers . Most schools have developed programs concerned with the “whole student” and are becoming increasingly aware of the need to develop extensive, albeit unresourced, interagency and broad community links. Much of the work and input is unpaid in the sense that teachers take on roles that are beyond their teaching duties, and which are often emotionally stressful. This is particularly the case in rural and remote schools where the teacher is very much part of the broader community and where there is often very little separation between their private and professional life within the community.

The negative impact of these major societal changes on the lives of students cannot be underestimated and the evidence demonstrates that in rural and remote communities this is even greater. Youth suicide is very high, the statistics for depression, crime and antisocial behaviour are alarming, youth unemployment is well above the rates in most urban areas, violence and harassment in schools is increasing and their sense that school is irrelevant and there is no point to it prevails. As indicated in our main submission, the Union is very concerned about the lack of legal protection against discrimination towards students in most non government schools.

The Union strongly recommends better provision of specialist and crisis services for both schools and families in remote and rural areas.

The Union particularly draws the Commission's attention to the support arrangements for students with disabilities. Legislation clearly requires non government schools to accept students with disabilities which means that adequate resourcing must be provided in order that the schools can meet the particular needs of these students. Currently, funding arrangements mean that

the level of funding for integration students in non government schools is completely inadequate. By way of example, in Victoria students with disabilities in government schools are funded at approximately \$11960 per pupil whereas the funding for the 2800 pupils with disabilities in Catholic schools is \$2477 per pupil.

The Union recommends the Commission to inquire further as to the appropriateness of exemptions (particularly blanket exemptions) from anti discrimination laws for religious schools particularly as they apply to students.

Schools are required to meet the broad educational needs of a very diverse school population. Relevant and quality education has to be delivered across the K-12 levels to students of different socio economic and cultural backgrounds and with different learning styles and capacities. Schools are required to balance the need for relevant vocational education within their operation with the broad educational needs of the student population. The broad spectrum of educational agendas which have to be addressed by schools include:

- the early years - literacy and numeracy etc.;
- the middle years - appropriate structures, resourcing and pedagogy;
- special needs students;
- changing emphasis on outcomes based education and meeting individual needs;
- greater community involvement, parent participation, interagency approaches in schools.

Schools and systems have been involved in a range of initiatives which are designed to address the regime of needs in terms of post compulsory schooling. These involve such initiatives as:

- structural changes - senior colleges, extended days, school/TAFE campuses;
- joint school TAFE initiatives;
- broader vocational education offerings, associated accreditation for schools and teachers and credit transfer and articulation arrangements;
- industry placement of students and a recognition that schools need to rethink their work organisation arrangements to be able to do this.

The IEU believes that public policy needs to focus and strengthen through higher levels of funding, the respective roles of schools, TAFE and higher education, in relation to the VET agenda which does not preclude the possibility of cooperative alliances and partnership arrangements between institutions and within and across the sectors.

The IEU believes that HREOC report should support and encourage strengthening cooperative alliances between clusters of TAFE Colleges, (both metropolitan and rural), schools (both government and non government) and universities whereby strong mutual education and training partnership arrangements can be developed. This would have the effect of:

- strengthening partnership arrangements with other education institutions and with industry;
- strengthening resource utilisation and sharing;
- enhancing access and equity for those who are disadvantaged through socio economic, circumstance or geographic isolation;
- sharing of specialist staff resources and enhancing flexible delivery arrangements.

5. THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION SERVICES

The IEU believes that there should be public policy in place which provides for planned educational provision whereby new government and non government schools do not threaten the viability and stability of existing schools and further that schools are required to demonstrate initial and continuing financial and educational viability in order to receive public funds.

In rural and remote communities there is evidence of increasing competition for students and for scant resources to the extent that collaborative and cooperative endeavours between the schools and their staff and students are jeopardised. This is not in the best interests of education and in small communities can be divisive.

The IEU believes that HREOC's report and recommendations should support an examination of models of educational provision and their necessary funding arrangements whereby school communities look at ways in which there can be a reorganisation of resource sharing and curriculum offerings across schools and systems. Public policy should seek to strengthen the role of the school community as the locus of rebuilding the spirit and confidence of rural and regional Australia - around better libraries, sporting facilities, education and training facilities, technology infrastructure etc. Central to such research is the involvement and inclusion of these communities in their vision for how educational services might be organised in their communities.

One inexpensive way of implementing such a proposal might be the establishment of local community education planning bodies which would involve school communities, parents, school staffs and other town agencies. These committees could look at the cooperative use of resources and access to services. At present, some schools are involved in trial programs of "full service schooling". Such a model could help facilitate an integrated approach to the efficient and effective use of community services such as transport, sporting facilities libraries and technology and as well, strengthen local communities.

6. PARTNERSHIPS IN SCHOOL REFORM

A number of projects and practice can be pointed to which show that an inclusive partnership approach produces excellent outcomes in terms of both teaching and learning strategies and policy development. The National Schools Network, the National Professional Development Program and the Innovative Links project have been such initiatives. The strength of these initiatives derives from the negotiated and sustained partnerships between teacher educators, schools and schooling authorities, practitioners, teacher unions, professional associations and parent organisations. It is

worth noting that at the present time the National Schools Network remains the only truly national cooperative endeavour, involving the employers and education unions across the government and non government sectors, parents, teacher educators, and professional associations.

The IEU urges HREOC to include within its research base, case studies of reform projects and educational innovation in rural and remote communities (and urban communities for the learnings which are transferable) which have been recognised nationally and internationally as being successful, the methodology of which relies upon inclusive and democratic partnerships with the student, staff, parents and other key stakeholders involved in the education enterprise.

7. THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

In 1997, the IEU made submissions to and appeared before the Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teaching and argued **the union's fundamental belief that teachers and education support staff are central to the quality of education and training in Australia.** The IEU believes that the recommendations from that Inquiry contained in the report "A Class Act" should form the basis for strengthening Australia's education and training systems; for ensuring that all Australians have equitable access to the highest quality education and training; for recognising the central importance of teachers and for providing practical support to them.

The issues of recruitment and retention have caused much vexation amongst those members with whom we consulted for this submission. How to attract and retain high quality teaching staff to schools in rural and remote communities is a cause for great concern. Recent research indicates the likelihood of a significant shortage of teachers and teacher educators over the next five years as a critical mass of them retire. Ensuring that there are appropriately qualified entrants to the profession as well as programs for ongoing professional renewal are issues of national significance.

It is worth noting that the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) established a Taskforce in 1997 to examine issues of national teacher supply and demand particularly in relation to recruitment of high quality personnel into the teaching profession. While the union made a submission to the consultation process, we have received no advice as to any report or recommendations arising from the work of the Taskforce.

The IEU strongly believes that the issues of teacher recruitment and retention are directly connected with a number of others, including but not limited to, the status of the profession; the speed and process of policy change and implementation; the loss of resources to education; the salary and conditions paid to teachers and issues related to the need for professional standards. In developing a comprehensive strategy to properly manage national teacher supply and demand and teacher recruitment and retention, policy makers must address the overall contextual picture. Reasons for the current malaise within the profession, and community perceptions that it is a profession and career with little going for it, are complex and require scrutiny.

Issues of salary, allowances and value added conditions such as improved study, travel and long service leave, real and accessible career structures, employment mobility and opportunities of redeployment, portability of service and qualifications, well resourced and developed induction and orientation programs, and appropriate standards of affordable housing and family support are just some of the areas which are desperately lacking for staff employed in non government schools in rural and remote communities. These are issues which require urgent attention if the discrimination in the provision of educational services to rural and remote communities is to be redressed.

The IEU urges the Commission to support the findings from the Senate Inquiry into The Status of Teaching and its recommendations and to urge the government to give priority to their implementation, in particular to those related to the recruitment and retention of teachers.

The IEU requests that HREOC recommend to government, an examination of the possibility of the funding and employing authorities developing teacher incentives to encourage employment in rural and remote schools for a sustained period of time to give continuity and predictability of staffing arrangements. Such schema should also have provisions for professional development, improved leave conditions and redeployment to other schools after an agreed period of service. One such proposal should examine the possibility of the employer taking over the HECS debt of beginning teachers who agree to take up employment in rural and remote schools for a fixed period of employment. Hand in hand with would need to be properly developed and agreed provisions on induction and support for beginning teachers into such a school setting.

8. INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

The education and training of Australia's indigenous citizens is in a state of absolute crisis. On every benchmark of student achievement in literacy and numeracy and other areas of the curriculum, and on every other criteria including enrolment, attendance, satisfactory completion of primary and secondary to year 10, retention to year 12, participation in post school training or tertiary education, indigenous children are well behind their non indigenous peers. The story is similarly distressing in relation to their health and welfare and their socialisation within the school community. This bleak picture is an indictment upon successive Australian governments for their failure to develop and implement policy and strategies which address what is essentially the denial of fundamental human rights to this group of Australian citizens.

The IEU strongly supports the community campaign for reconciliation with Australia's indigenous peoples and in 1997 the Union's Federal Council passed a motion apologising and expressing deep sorrow and regret for the great harm done to the stolen generations by colonial and federal and state government policies since 1788. The IEU is committed to informing its members about the truth of the history of relations between indigenous and non indigenous people and to contributing to the education and developing consciousness of the Australian community about this difficult and awful aspect of the nation's history.

The IEU believes that contained within the myriad of significant research reports (such as the Stolen Generations report "Bringing Them Home" and the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody) done over the past 10 to 15 years about the plight of Australia's indigenous citizens, there exists expertise and wisdom about ways forward. So many recommendations have been made over the years and so many of the reports have been ignored or acted on only in part.

The IEU urges that these reports and recommendations be considered by the HREOC and be included in the audit and research base recommended in 1. above and further that they inform the recommendations put forward by the Commission in the report from this Inquiry.

The IEU strongly supports the current work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to advance reconciliation and urges HREOC to lend its significant authority to these endeavours and where possible to work in partnership with the Council on its broad range of strategies.

9. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

There can be little doubt that new technologies have the capacity to profoundly affect educational practice at all levels. Technology has the potential to reorganise curriculum knowledge requirements and the resources that teachers use to prepare and deliver their programs. Its use requires not only new teacher skills, but a reconceptualisation of what it means to teach. Teachers require an in-depth knowledge about the organisation of knowledge itself in order to use the new technologies. A new pedagogy is required which is dependent on the appropriate and systematic integration of information technologies and school practices.

Much of the literature on future models of schooling (Lepani et al) emphasises the connections that schools need to strengthen with the local community, so that the barriers between home and school become "borderless". Other bodies of literature emphasise the technological revolution that will enable educators to be conduits to a boundless amount of information, and will transform vertical models of curriculum delivery.

What is clear however is that teachers will still be working with students and will have to bring critical professional judgement to bear upon the choice of teaching and learning strategies to suit those students' educational needs. It is important that policy makers and schooling authorities see technology as another valuable tool (together with books, TV, video, peer tutoring, student counselling, education support staff contact interaction, special education services etc.) in the teaching and learning process, not as the solution (or panacea) for increasing community demands and rising costs in the provision of educational services.

Of critical importance is the provision of the necessary infrastructure to rural and remote communities to effect this "technological revolution". The anecdotal evidence in the media and in our own consultations suggests that the provision, maintenance and servicing of even mid 20th century technology such as telephone lines and equipment can cause difficulties for some communities, to say nothing about

the provision of appropriate bandwidth digital lines for computer and internet technology. The IEU sees the government's failure to provide such communication services to rural and remote Australia as inequitable and discriminatory for those communities.

The IEU urges HREOC to report to government that the failure to provide to rural and remote communities equitable access to technology infrastructure which can assist these communities, and particularly their schools, to connect with each other and more broadly, in the same way that communities in urban centres can, is discriminatory and contributes to the growing sense of isolation and division felt by these communities. The IEU believes that there is the need to investigate the strategies employed by governments of other countries as to how they achieve national coverage of such equipment.