



Indigenous Education

IEUA Policy Statement

DRAFT – for consultation

April 2009

The IEUA believes that critical attention is required in relation to a wide range of Indigenous Education issues. The fact that Australia's Aboriginal peoples remain at the bottom level of every economic, health and social indicator is unacceptable and should be a source of national shame.

The IEUA notes that fundamental issues of access and equity have yet to be addressed in many communities.

Further, the IEUA notes that there are successful programs in relation to Indigenous education being implemented in some places, but these successes are usually isolated, short lived and do not have a wider positive impact on the overall system.

Consequently the IEUA believes that Indigenous education policy and action cannot be "more of the same". There is a need to develop different structures and models that take into account the needs of Indigenous students and their particular communities and that are appropriate to the context.

Such an approach must be underpinned by the requirement for prior consultation with and the agreement of local communities. The success of new and flexible approaches will depend on a shared sense of ownership.

The Federal Education Agenda

The IEUA welcomes the federal government's commitments to 'halving the gap' and the COAG targets for the national education agenda.

The IEUA supports the principles outlined in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, specifically that Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to close the gap for young indigenous Australians

Further, the IEUA notes and supports the recommendations and goals outlined in the MCEETYA *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* document, calling on all governments in Australia to re-commit to the principles and actions, particularly in relation to matters still outstanding.

The IEUA specifically calls for action in relation to the following areas:

Students

The fact the Australia's indigenous people remain at the bottom level of every economic, health and social indicator is unacceptable. The report *Dropping of the Edge* released by professor Tony Vinson in 2007 (2) found that "despite our nations' recent strong economic growth, some communities remain caught in a spiral of low school attainment, high unemployment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse".

The Vincent report recommended a number of policy directions to address areas of greatest disadvantage, including for indigenous children and young people.

In respect to education and training, the report recommended :

raising the educational attainment by improving early education programs, preschool attendance and improving primary schooling outcomes;
Guaranteeing three and four year old children living in the 10% most disadvantaged localities in each state/territory 18 hours per week of free pre-school; and
Support for projects which combine personal support, attention to educational deficits and skills development for disengaged young people.

The IEUA believes that correcting this must be a national priority.

The IEUA calls for:

- increased resources and support, particularly investment in linking pre-schooling and schooling to communities,

- strong focus on indigenous culture and languages in pedagogical approaches to learning
- significant increases in resourcing and implementation of strategies targeted at rapidly increasing the pool of indigenous teachers and other education staff.

Early Childhood Education

The IEUA notes that there is evidence that parental involvement and support, inclusion of Indigenous staff in preschools and providing information to families and communities through local networks, have been some of the successful strategies used to increase Indigenous enrolments.

Further the IEUA notes that Indigenous presence, whether it is created through staff and other Indigenous involvement in the preschool, or an environment that is rich with Indigenous culture, is fundamental to providing a place where Indigenous children learn and want to keep learning.

In this context the IEUA and its Branches calls on governments and school employers to address barriers and improve the quality and appropriateness of early childhood services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Further, there should be commitments by governments to further the achievement of universal access to two years of preschool education for all Indigenous children. Barriers to enrolment and participation, whether systemic or local, must be addressed.

Employment and Staffing

There is a need for urgent strategies to build the numbers of teachers and other educators particularly of Indigenous languages.

Commitment needs to be made to encourage Indigenous people to pursue teaching careers and strategies put in place to retain in these people in education.

Governments and school systems need to commit resources to funding and supporting Indigenous educators to undertake teacher training.

Additionally, the embedding professional development and training an understanding of how to develop and implement a culturally relevant and flexible learning program is required.

Teacher education programs need to ensure that graduate teachers have:

- Studied Indigenous history and cultures
- Recognized relevant issues for Indigenous students and school communities
- Developed effective teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of Indigenous students
- Developed strategies for the full inclusion of Indigenous students in the educational life of schools

There is a need to ensure that industrial agreements provide working conditions attractive to Indigenous people

Governments and employers need to ensure that family and cultural obligations of Indigenous staff are recognized and embraced, with a view to overcoming the cultural isolation of Indigenous staff

Governments and employers need to commit additional resources to recruit and retain classroom teachers and leaders working in geographically isolated Indigenous schools and communities.

School and System Responsibilities

Schools and schools systems should commit to strategies and actions that promote:

- Community friendly schools
- Appropriate connection to the community in which the school operates
- Respectful use of community member time
- Accessibility of the school for all families
- The use of creative ways to get families involved

The National Curriculum

The work on the national curriculum should include consideration of the Teaching of Indigenous History

This work should include:

- The Development of resources to link with professional learning for teachers
- Inclusion of compulsory indigenous content

In noting that Language is the essence of Indigenous Cultural Identity, it is clear that the preservation of Indigenous Languages is a critical issue as many have already been lost and others are on the way to being lost. Indigenous children should be taught in their first language due to the importance of language in the learning process. There is a need to recognise that Indigenous languages need to be spoken and taught in schools. Further, there needs to be a negotiation of the balance between teaching in the dominant language and other local or heritage languages.

Indigenous Cultural perspective needs to be acknowledged, valued and included in all education structures including development of curriculum.

Consultation with Indigenous Communities to ensure that Cultural and Language appropriate strategies are embedded in all aspects of education provision for

Indigenous Students and consultation, particularly when establishing health and education services, in remote locations.

Challenges for the IEUA

The IEUA and its Branches commit to supporting staff who are members. Further the IEUA and its Branches will examine strategies in relation to recruitment, retention, activism and promotion of the Union among Indigenous employees.

The IEUA and its Branches notes the need to expand union membership of Indigenous Educators and will develop resource kits specifically aimed at recruiting.

The IEUA and its Branches will work to encourage and support the participation of Indigenous staff in union structures.

The IEUA and its Branches will continue to lobby governments to enact appropriate legislation where necessary and hold governments accountable to appropriate resourcing to meet the COAG targets.

The IEUA and its Branches will continue to engage with Indigenous communities and representative groups, ensuring that feedback is provided to governments

The IEUA and its Branches notes the need for respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and will work to ensure that the Union is culturally competent when dealing with Community Members.

The IEUA and its Branches will work to build relationships with Indigenous communities to support the work of union organisers in recruiting and activating members.