



## WORKING POLICY ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

### 1.0 Preamble and Context

Information technology (IT) has the potential to radically change the nature of schooling and education as we move into the 21st century.

While IT has been in use in Australian schools over the last decade, in the main it has been used for administration (timetables, markbooks, library management, reporting, budgets, class lists, etc) and discrete information technology studies. The full potential for the integration of IT as a learning tool into the day to day teaching and learning programs within the school has yet to be realised.

Many systems and schools are aware of research that indicates significant improvements in student learning when IT is combined with appropriate teaching and learning methods to produce information literate students. The same systems and schools are under continual parental and community pressure to incorporate the new technologies into their school programs, especially given that IT is now a basic tool within most work environments. As a consequence, schools and systems are now developing technology policies and programs to meet these demands. This is to be welcomed, as in general, the planned introduction of IT into schools to this point has been fragmented and under resourced.

Information Technology is expensive. Schools and systems are beginning to recognise that IT is not a one-off cost, but an ongoing high demand budget item for hardware, technical support, and for training and professional development. As such, the issue of equity of access to IT for all students and teachers, in all types of school systems, becomes of grave concern.

The literature of academics and IT experts reflects the following view:

*"computers may multiply the teacher's effectiveness, but they do not replace him/her. Computers serve learning best when they link teacher, student and information in new, more effective ways instead of simply supplanting teachers or textbooks."* (Wilson and Daviss (1994), Redesigning Education p.88)

However the introduction of IT into schools has been characterised by a shameful neglect of training, professional development, technical support and occupational health and safety information, leaving teachers and support staff with feelings of inadequacy.

All too often there has been competition for scarce resources within a school, and a haphazard approach to whole school IT development. A typical approach has been to leave complicated and technical decisions to staff who are interested and self taught, but who may have limited experience.

The consequences of this history are increased stress levels and workloads for support and teaching staff.

Through discussion with teachers and support staff at branch meetings, on school visits, at forums and conference, the IEU has become aware of a growing concern about the issues relating to Information Technology and its implementation in schools. There is particular demand for development of a planned whole school approach, which will maximise the use of resources available and contribute most to learning. A planned approach should develop strategies for implementation of IT in terms of an ongoing process built into the infrastructure of the school, with appropriate recurrent funding to meet present needs and future directions and innovations.

## **2.0 The IEU has identified the following key issues**

### 2.1 Professional Issues

- the provision of appropriate and timely training including pre-service training;
- the need for funded professional development programs within schooltime.

### 2.2 Industrial Issues

- appropriate staffing and release time for both management and technical support;
- proper remuneration;
- occupational health and safety - rights of workers and responsibilities of employers;
- equity in relationship to access for students and staff;
- class size ratios.

### 2.3 Curriculum Issues

- the integration of IT into current teaching and learning programs;
- the development of Australian software;
- the promotion of Information Literacy through development of information skills programs in all curriculum areas.

### 2.4 The Issue of Appropriate Resource Provision Impacts Across Every Area

## **3.0 Information Technology Development in Schools and Systems**

To ensure that Information Technology is introduced into schools to enhance teaching and learning, employers should develop policy and procedures which provide a systems level infrastructure for IT implementation with guidelines for a process of planned school level IT development over time.

### 3.1 At Systems Level

The policy and procedures should:

- ensure proper ongoing resourcing;
- plan to provide budgetary, technical (hardware and software), OHS and curriculum advice (especially through including the use of) specialist consultants;
- plan for staffing;
- plan for technical support;
- outline reasonable timelines for implementation;
- plan to ensure equity of access for all groups (female and male students, teachers, support staff, special needs students, etc);
- provide for ongoing training and professional development programs in regard to the integration and incorporation of IT into the curriculum;
- set standards including those for Occupational Health and Safety;
- provide for a K-12 approach.

### 3.2 At School Level

Policy and procedures should:

- require a planned approach to whole school IT development;
- establish a technology committee with responsibility for planning and development;
- budget to provide recurrent funding for all aspects of school IT implementation (eg: hardware, software, infrastructure - furniture, wiring, staffing, technical support, training and PD, etc);
- reflect systems level policy where appropriate;
- provide for training appropriate to the needs of all staff;
- plan for ongoing professional development to support the integration of IT into the school's curriculum programs and meet other relevant needs;
- provide strategies for equal access for all groups.
- consider the roles and responsibilities of staff (IT manager, curriculum co-ordinator, teacher-librarian, clerical and support staff, etc) including release time and remuneration;
- provide healthy and safe work spaces for all staff and students;
- address organisational issues including appropriate teacher-student ratios.

## **4.0 The Implementation of Policies and Procedures**

The IEU supports the following principles and strategies in implementing the above procedures:

### 4.1 Support Staff

- support staff should be consulted about their professional development needs and adequate training must be provided to meet emerging technology issues and promote multi-skilling;
- the increasing technological skills of support staff should be taken into account when determining appropriate support staff roles, classifications and salary levels;

- there is a need to ensure that the increasing use of technology does not replace human interaction.

#### 4.2 Teaching Staff

- schools should be resourced to provide a paid technology management position with provision for appropriate release;
- every teacher should have free access to appropriate training and professional development in relation to hardware, software and classroom management practices and their integration across the curriculum;
- policies should ensure that teachers have access to technology as a tool to facilitate the preparation of teaching materials, programming and assessment and reporting.

#### 4.3 General Principles

- enhancing learning is the main focus in the development of information technology in the school environment;
- every student and teacher should have access to current information technology resources including information sources such as the Internet;
- membership of school technology committees should represent the school community and include key learning areas, library, IT, a member of the leadership team and representatives of parents and student bodies.

### **5.0 Other Issues and Action**

- 5.1 The NSW/ACT IEU will monitor the experience of IT implementation in schools and pursue the goals set out in this policy. IT issues will be considered in the development of future Awards and Enterprise Agreements.
- 5.2 The union will continue to lobby for support and adequate funding from government and educational authorities;
- 5.3 The union will continue to provide information through its various publications, website and IT training in the absence of suitable employer organised programs.

This policy framework has been developed to assist employers and staff with the difficulties faced as Information Technology continues to be introduced into schools so that planned, meaningful use of IT and resources may be achieved.