



INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION
OF AUSTRALIA

**HREOC INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND
REMOTE EDUCATION**

October, 1999

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU) welcomes the opportunity to respond to HREOC's Inquiry into the provision of educational services to rural and remote communities.
- 1.2 The IEU is the federally registered organisation which represents the industrial and professional interests of teachers and school support staff in all non government institutions across Australia. The union has a current membership of approximately 45000 teachers, principals, librarians, counsellors and school support staff in all states and territories across primary and secondary schools, early childhood centres and private post compulsory colleges such as business colleges and ELICOS colleges.
- 1.3 The IEU consulted its members at both the state and national levels to prepare this submission. Member focus groups were held in rural centres and there was a strong interest and willingness to contribute to the submission. The participants appreciated the opportunity to have their voices heard.
- 1.4 The IEU (QLD) Branch has made a separate submission to this inquiry and appeared before the Commission in Brisbane on October 8. It has been included with this national submission (Attach 1). The NSWACT Branch also appeared before the Commission in Sydney and provided information about the inequities experienced by education staff who live and work in rural and remote communities in NSW and the discrimination in the provision of education services to students and their families in these communities. The IEU strongly endorses the submissions made by the branches and urges the Commission to take particular note of the recommendations and the comments made by their members who live and teach in rural and remote communities.
- 1.5 The IEU has also convened a reference group of Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) to tell their story and provide case studies about their work and about the schooling experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island young people. The report of this reference group will not be available in time for this written submission but will be forwarded to the Commission by the end of November.
- 1.6 Based on the definitions of *rural* and *remote* provided in the Commission's terms of reference, the union estimates that approximately 20% of its membership work in such communities. For example, all of the population centres in Northern Territory, including Darwin and Alice Springs, can be described as rural or remote. In the provision of services to these members, the union is acutely aware of their isolation and even alienation and the need to ensure that structures and strategies are in place which demonstrate our commitment to these members.
- 1.7 To illustrate this support, the Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian branches have committed resources to the establishment of union offices in regional communities (Townsville, Newcastle and Ballarat) in order to provide better servicing and organising of schools and greater accessibility to the Union for members.

- 1.8 This submission has been organised around the issues raised by the terms of reference, in particular those related to the costs for families, the equity and adequacy of specialist services, teacher incentives, professional development and retention, funding models for education and related services, the cultural appropriateness of education for indigenous children and their communities and technological support for teaching and learning.

2. COMPLEMENTARY INQUIRIES

- 2.1 In June 1996, the terms of reference for a Senate Inquiry into the status of teachers were established and the Report of that Inquiry "A Class Act" was published in March 1998. The IEU made a submission to and provided evidence before the Inquiry, all of which concurred with the Report. A key finding was that teachers are central to the quality of students' learning and therefore it is necessary to support teachers more effectively. The report said that "in terms of student achievement, *the teacher is a more significant factor than any other kind of school resource.*" (p7 "A Class Act")
- 2.2 For students and their families living in rural and remote communities, who over the last decade have seen the continuing and increasing withdrawal of community services such as health and welfare, banking, housing, legal support, child care services, and rapidly diminishing employment opportunities, the significance of the schooling experience and the importance of the teacher's role is even more critical.
- 2.3 The Senate Inquiry report noted the staffing problems of rural and remote schools nationwide, but in particular those in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia. It stated:

"While there may be an excess of teachers in city locations, this does not guarantee they will be able or willing to move to rural or remote areas to take up teaching positions...."

Witnesses described how professional and personal isolation was a disincentive to country appointment. Other problems faced by teachers in rural and remote communities include:

- *decreasing school populations*
- *dwindling community support*
- *limited curriculum options, resulting in teachers often being asked to teach outside their area of expertise*
- *higher youth unemployment and suicide rates*
- *security and accommodation problems*
- *limited access to professional development.*

A special incentive program is needed to attract teachers to these areas and to retain them there..." ("A Class Act pp244-245)

- 2.4 Despite the very strong community response to this Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teaching and the unanimity of view expressed by participants from all sides of the political, industrial and educational spectrum, it is worth noting that

the Federal Minister has not acted on any of the recommendations contained within this Senate Inquiry report to date.

3. THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS

3.1 This HREOC Inquiry arises from the Commission's fundamental role in defending and promoting the human rights of Australian citizens. The reasons for the Inquiry and its terms of reference are founded on a number of the International Covenants and Conventions to which Australia is a signatory.

- Conventions on the Rights of the Child
- International Covenant On Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons

From the Commission's extensive consultations with citizens living in rural and remote communities and the numerous organisations which have an interest and a responsibility in the provision of education services to the families in these communities, the Union hopes that recommendations will be forthcoming from the Inquiry which will redress the discrimination experienced by students and their families and the teachers and support staff in relation to the provision of education services.

3.2 The Union is strongly supportive of an appropriate legislative regime being in place to ensure that the fundamental human right of equitable access to high quality education for all Australian citizens is available. Over the past 25 years, a raft of anti discrimination legislation has been put in place by Federal, State and Territory governments to make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, religion, disability, sexuality, pregnancy, family responsibilities, social origin, and other areas.

3.3 At the time some of this legislation was being formulated and debated, there was strong argument from sections of the community that it was not possible to change attitudes and behaviour through legislation. It has to be said that these arguments resonated with many across the political spectrum. In fact, the Union believes that the anti discrimination legislation has been a powerful change agent in achieving a more open, tolerant and plural society. Moreover, such legislative frameworks are a signal to the international community that the Australian government is proactive in its determination to ensure that it complies with its human rights obligations.

4. COSTS OF SCHOOLING AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1 At the outset, it should be noted that the Constitutional responsibility for the provision of education lies with State and Territory governments. The Commonwealth government runs no primary or secondary school in the country and employs no teacher or school support staff . Its role with regard to the nation's schooling lies principally with funding responsibilities it has undertaken in relation to some of the recurrent and capital costs of non government schools and for targeted programs in both the government and non government sectors, and the consequent political influence that such funding provision gives to the Commonwealth in terms of policy and program direction.

- 4.2 Nevertheless, the Constitutional powers have implications for the way decision making in relation to schooling occurs in Australia. Most would acknowledge that there has been a difficult and tense history of Commonwealth and States rights in relation to education. To some degree, this has been ameliorated with the role of MCEETYA, the Commonwealth and State Ministers for Education Training and Youth Affairs Committee, through which agreements have been brokered across the range of issues which affect the nation's schooling, such as the recently agreed National and Agreed Goals For Schooling 2000 and beyond. These jurisdictional arrangements will have implications for any recommendations which arise out of the Commission's deliberations in relation to the provision of education for rural and remote communities.

Average and Marginal School Costs

- 4.3. The Union is on the record as having argued before government inquiries into the funding of schooling about the necessity, in the public interest, for governments to fund the dominant education systems to cater for all Australian children including those in small, rural, isolated, poor and disadvantaged communities, and NESB and ATSI communities.
- 4.4 The Union believes that the ideology of economic rationalism is inappropriate for education generally, and in particular does not work in the bush. The funding of schooling in both the government and non government sectors involves quite complex issues, including the difference between the average and marginal per capita costs for the operation of the large education systems. In the non government sector, the efficiencies able to be gained from the economies of scale of running large systems in highly populated urban centres do not exist in rural and remote communities. The average per capita costs for educating a student in Australia do not reflect the real costs of educating a student in rural and regional Australia. This is the overwhelming message from members who work in schools in those areas. Whilst the costs of educating a student in a metropolitan schools may be high, there are particular problems faced by families in rural areas.
- 4.5 To illustrate the difficulties of funding education in rural and isolated regions of the country, the union has evidence of past informal subsidy arrangements being in existence between the more heavily populated urban Dioceses and rural Dioceses in the state of NSW. Attached to the submission is a report from the CEO in Wilcannia-Forbes to an October 1997 Teachers' Forum which acknowledges with thanks a contribution of \$20,000 from the Archdiocese of Canberra/Goulburn, the funds to be deposited in the CEO's Capital Support Account. (Attach 2). A further example is a decision taken by the Parramatta Diocese to provide the Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese with \$1.5 million over three years from 1997 (3 payments of \$500,000). The first two payments were made for 1997 and 1998, however the third may not have been paid because of the reclassification of Catholic schools to funding category 11. Another small amount of funding was allocated by Parramatta to Armidale. Such payments have been ad hoc and demonstrate the lack of adequate and comprehensive funding to allow Dioceses such as Wilcannia Forbes meet its teaching and learning needs. In the last year adjustments have been made to the allocative formulae to alleviate the funding pressures on these remote Dioceses.

- 4.6 In relation to the distribution of recurrent Commonwealth funds at the NSW state level, this is centralised through the NSW Catholic Education Commission on a needs based formulae which provides for a percentage of the per capita funding for the wealthier Dioceses to be allocated to the poorer Dioceses.

Implications for Student Learning Outcomes

- 4.7 The Australian community expects the education systems, and in particular the public system, to be properly resourced and comprehensive and to set the benchmark or community standard for the provision of education for all Australian school students.

The anecdotal evidence from IEU members who teach in rural and remote schools does not support this to be the case and academic research from a range of sources supports this view.

- 4.8 In relation to this latter point, a striking example of differences in learning outcomes between students in rural and remote areas and students in more mainstream learning communities was evident in the National School English Literacy Survey, initiated and funded by the Federal government and undertaken in 1996. The Report "Mapping Literacy Achievement" provided for the first time a national map of the broad range of literacy achievements among year 3 and year 5 students in Australian schools, documenting the varied levels of student achievement in those aspects of literacy which constitute the framework of the English curriculum profile, Reading, Writing (including Spelling), Speaking, Listening and Viewing.

- 4.9 Two separate samples of students were established to collect data for the survey, the Main Sample and Special Indigenous Sample. As there were not sufficient numbers of indigenous students in the Main Sample to enable reliable conclusions to be drawn about the achievements of indigenous students as a national subgroup, it was decided after consultation with Aboriginal Consultative Groups in all States and Territories, to set up a special sample of indigenous students. (It is important to note that the achievement data in this Special Sample is not representative of the achievement levels of all indigenous students in Australia.) The Special Indigenous Sample was a sample of students in those schools reporting at least five indigenous students at both year 3 and year 5 and provides a picture of the literacy learning of that subgroup of indigenous students, largely living in rural and remote areas where the indigenous population is concentrated.

- 4.10 What were the findings? The National Management Committee's letter to the Federal Minister noted the following:

In relation to the Main Sample of students, "the survey data on the various subgroups are in line with the direction of existing literacy research. Children from high socio-economic backgrounds as a group achieve at significantly higher levels than children from other socio-economic backgrounds. Girls outperform boys. Students from a language background other than English as a group have lower levels of literacy in English than students from English speaking backgrounds. The achievement differences arising from groupings

based on socio-economic background are larger than for gender and the differences arising from gender are in turn larger than those arising from a language background other than English.

Students in the Special Indigenous Sample have very low average levels of English literacy achievement. However, there is a very wide range of literacy achievement amongst these students at both year 3 and year 5. The survey data suggest that during the middle primary years the top 20 percent of students in this sample appear to make quite good progress while the bottom 20 percent of students often appear to make practically no progress. At year 5 in Reading, Writing and Speaking, this group of lower achieving students is still at a very basic stage in developing literacy skills. For a significant proportion of these lower achieving students, English is a second language. Students in the Special Indigenous Sample, on average, achieve comparatively strongly in Listening compared to other aspects of literacy. They achieve comparatively poorly in Reading."

- 4.11 These are important findings for the Commission to consider. Given the high rates of un and underemployment in rural and remote communities, and the increasing poverty of the families within them, there is little doubt that the literacy achievement of students in these communities will, on average, be consistent with the findings of the 1996 survey. In fact, this has been borne out by statistics released by the Department of Education in NSW as a result of Freedom of Information enquiries related to the literacy achievement results of the NSW Basic Skills Testing program. These results are consistent with the National Literacy Survey and show that the levels of literacy achievement in rural and remote districts of the State are at a much lower level than those of students attending schools in urban areas. The newspaper reports related to these findings are attached to the submission. (Attach 3)
- 4.12 It is therefore easy to understand why the drop out rates of students is higher and the general sense of disillusionment, frustration and alienation works against educational opportunity and ambition. Given this, it is difficult to understand why there has not been a more aggressively targeted approach to the educational needs of rural and remote communities with significantly improved levels of funding on the part of both Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. In light of the very disturbing evidence from the survey in relation to the literacy achievement of indigenous students, the failure of the Northern Territory government to continue the bi-lingual program for indigenous students is scandalous.

Specialist services – adequacy of these to support children

- 4.13 The IEU also expresses concern about the lack of adequate social and specialist services for children in remote and rural areas. This ranges from the need for an orthodontist to family counselling, a specialist for a particular disability such as autism, ADHD, or cerebral palsy.
- 4.14 In the circumstance where specialist assistance is sought by either the school or the family, it usually entails travelling long distances. The level of commitment needed to access such assistance is high, and is a huge obstacle to overcome. If there is a particular crisis in a school or family, crisis counselling will not

generally be found locally. If a student has ADHD or is intellectually disabled, they might be the only student experiencing a particular disorder. This engenders a sense of isolation and means that if their family wants to try and access other families experiencing similar problems, they may also have to travel long distances to find the right resources and support. All too often, the teacher becomes the professional turned to for help, but the teacher needs support and links to both welfare roles within the school, and links outside the school.

- 4.15 There are also problems with the isolation students experience in rural areas. A child may be experiencing questions about his/her sexuality and need to speak to someone supportive. It is extremely difficult for that student to speak to their own peers about this, and there may be a strong need for anonymity. Apart from accessing an emergency help line, the student will often feel understandably reluctant to speak to someone local, and they face very few real options about accessing the appropriate guidance and support.
- 4.16 The IEU wishes to express strong concern about the lack of legal protection against discrimination towards students in many non government schools. The Commonwealth and all States and Territories have enacted various anti discrimination legislation which aims to prevent discrimination in the provision of education on a number of grounds. The grounds that may be of particular relevance to rural and remote students are discrimination on the grounds of race, cultural background, and disability. These laws are vital in ensuring that Australia meets its obligations under a number of international covenants or treaties including:
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
 - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
 - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
 - Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975)
- 4.17 However, many students in non government schools are not provided with the full protection of these laws because they provide exemptions for non government and/or religious schools. In some jurisdictions these exemptions are limited, in that the school would need to show that the discrimination was necessary in order to uphold the teachings of the religion. Of greater concern are the NSW and Victorian jurisdictions which provide a complete exemption to religious or non government schools. These exemptions mean that roughly a quarter of students in Australia's schools have either no protection or limited protection from discrimination in education.
- 4.18 A recent report by La Trobe University of same sex attracted youth (*Writing Themselves In: A National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well-Being of Same-Sex Attracted Young People, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 1998*) points to some important issues for gay and lesbian students in rural and remote schools. 751 young people participated in the survey and 22% of the sample came from rural areas. The report found that the young people from rural areas "were experiencing a greater sense of isolation and lack of access to information than their urban peers." Of particular concern are the implications for the health of these young people. The report found that those from rural areas were more likely to have injected drugs and

were more likely to state that they never used condoms in gay or heterosexual sex. The report also found that over 50% of participants experienced physical or verbal abuse and that nearly all of this happened at school. It is alarming that as many young people in the study reported feeling unsafe at school as those who reported feeling unsafe on the streets. (15% felt unsafe on the streets and 14% at schools).

- 4.19 The Union strongly urges the Commission to give this issue close attention in its report, in particular to the possible impact of the exemptions to anti – discrimination laws for non government and religious schools, in providing protection to these young people. For example, laws relating to sexual harassment (which include harassment on the grounds of actual or assumed sexuality) apply in certain situations to students as well as to employees in schools, both in terms of obligations placed on students and protection afforded to them. These laws may not apply in schools covered by exemptions to these laws. Similarly, laws that make discrimination on the grounds of sexuality unlawful, may not apply. This should be of a particular concern to the Commission in terms of Australia meetings it obligations under a number of international treaties referred to above.
- 4.19 Of paramount concern is the fact that suicide rates, especially for young adult males, are particularly high in rural areas. The Victorian Taskforce report into Suicide Prevention (1997) found that small, isolated country towns are vulnerable to high suicide rates, in particular where there are populations of less than 20,000. The report recommended that there be better regional and rural counselling and mental health services established that focus on the needs of Koori people and males in small and isolated communities.

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

Cultural and Curriculum Opportunities

- 4.20 It is difficult to provide diverse cultural and curriculum opportunities for students when doing so means travelling hundreds of kilometres with its associated costs. Consequently, young children may finish primary school without having, for example, visited a zoo, watched a cultural event like ballet, or met students from different cultural backgrounds. It is also rare to find a LOTE specialist in a country area, which is a strong disincentive from learning another language.
- 4.21 Despite the pre-eminence of sport within the national psyche as a cultural and leisure pursuit, choices regarding sporting activities are limited to what the town can actually offer – whether it has, for example, a swimming pool or a gymnasium. Even when a cultural activity such as a play comes to the school, there is usually an additional cost to cover travelling expenses. The cost of encouraging a student to participate in a specialist sporting or cultural interest will generally prohibit them from taking it up.
- 4.22 It is clear that schools in remote areas and in many small rural townships are not resourced to anywhere near the level that is taken for granted in larger regional centres or urban schools. This resourcing relates to both staff resourcing and

materials resourcing. Whilst class sizes in rural and remote areas are generally favourable, there is little if any, access to special needs resourcing such as literacy, behavioural or counselling support. Often this is because there is simply no specialist available. In relation to materials resources, rural and remote schools rely heavily on sharing materials between schools, which puts added burdens on staff. In the absence of such cooperative arrangements, schools must simply do without. The most glaring deficiency currently is the access to IT, especially when compared to the substantial roll-out undertaken in government schools.

5. THE SOCIAL COSTS

Pressure on Families

5.1 The IEU has concerns about the pressure on families in small towns to resource schools in order to keep them alive. Small schools are usually not financially viable – nevertheless, even as a small “product” students in them have the same entitlements as every other student to a safe classroom, a good education and a future that contains choices. Families are often called on to continually help keep a school going through either the provision of time, fund raising, or local community activities. There is a strong desire to see small schools survive, as the alternative if they are not there, might be a boarding school or families relocating closer to a regional city.

5.2 There are also pockets of rural areas where there is a disproportionately high number of families living close to or on the poverty line. The principal of a Catholic primary school in Victoria commented:

“There is a very high number of struggling families living here, partly because the cost of living is perceived as low. They are trying to manage on Social Security payments. A number of the parents are experiencing problems with addiction – to drinking, gambling, or violence.”

5.3 Incomes can vary from season to season in rural areas, and are often dependent on variables such as the weather. A major store or a bank closure can cripple a small town’s economic capacity. The economic impact of this type of uncertainty is felt in schools – and schools frequently become the last bastion of hope when all other infrastructure is disappearing.

Transport

5.4 Parents have to either drive students long distances or try and gain access to local bus services in many areas of Australia. Some transport routes are government funded, some are not, and for non-government schools, access to a funded service will depend often on ad hoc arrangements with the local government school. There is a need to thoroughly investigate the provision of funded transport services to remote areas, and to ensure that students from non-government schools are not disadvantaged.

6. STUDENT RETENTION

- 6.1 Despite the hard work that teachers in rural areas undertake to try and encourage students to stay at school so that they can make informed decisions about the future, the stark reality is that staying beyond Year 10 in an area that only has a P-10 school necessitates hard decisions about options. A student may have to leave her family to finish her schooling, and this raises questions about the quality of education and support that can be found in boarding schools – a mode of education that is not necessarily ideal for young children.
- 6.2 Many farming families are resigned to the fact that they will be the last generation to stay on the land, and it is difficult for their children who have inherited a similar interest and developed similar skills, to know what the future holds for them. Tertiary institutions and TAFE outreach are usually a long distance away, so staying in education can often mean leaving everything you know – home, town, friends.
- 6.3 Unemployment is generally higher in remote and rural areas than in cities. Access to good vocational training or a traineeship is still limited. Students who are able to undertake VET courses in their school have very limited access to the required structured workplace learning and are consequently disadvantaged in terms of learning outcomes and familiarity with employment possibilities. Students in these areas do not often have any real options open to them unless they move.

7. TEACHER INCENTIVES, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

- 7.1 The IEU has made several submissions in the past in regard to the link that must be made between the status of the profession, and the industrial conditions of employment and wages of the teaching profession. The problems associated with this are exacerbated when looking at remote and rural education. This submission is based on the premise that the Australian community must actively seek to improve the status of teachers, and this will not occur unless there is a commensurate improvement in the salaries and conditions that the profession as a whole attracts.
- 7.2 In relation to the employment conditions of teachers in Catholic schools, it is clearly demonstrable that teachers working for Catholic systemic employers in remote areas of the country do not even have the same conditions as their colleagues in the government school sector which it should be said, are less than satisfactory.
- 7.3 This includes limited provision of isolated allowances, no access to transfer to more preferred regions in a state after a length of service, extremely limited access to redeployment if redundancy occurs, and delayed and lesser outcomes at each round of enterprise bargaining negotiations. To illustrate this, attached to this submission is a document comparing the % salary increases of the NSW Diocese Wilcannia-Forbes with the rest of the Dioceses in NSW from December 1993 to the present (Attach 4) and a similar comparison of the current Coordinator rates. Also attached are the relevant clauses from the 1998 Teachers and Principals (Catholic Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes) Enterprise Agreement

(Attach 5) which provide for isolation allowances for the first time to operate from February 1998 and to be phased in over three years.

- 7.4 In what is called the western divisional zone, there are 29 Catholic schools. The Agreement provides for the payment of an isolation allowance in only 3 of those schools. Teachers in all the government schools in the zone are paid isolation allowances as provided for in their government teaching agreements.
- 7.5 To highlight the difference for teachers working in the different sectors the following information is worth noting:
- A teacher working in St Therese's Community School, Wilcannia is paid the allowance as per phase in year 2 of the Agreement and receives \$750.
 - Teachers working in government schools in Wilcannia receive 3 allowances:
 - \$707 with a further amount if the teacher has a spouse.
 - \$200-\$2300 socio economic allowance to compensate for isolation from goods and services
 - motor vehicle allowance of approximately \$1250 per year
- 7.6 The implication of these employment related matters manifests itself over time in the difficulty in attracting and keeping teaching staff, particularly teaching staff with experience. This view is consistent with employer comments to the Union about the problems in attracting staff and the effort that the employer has to make to attract teachers. There is no doubt that teachers do leave Catholic systemic employers to take jobs in the government school system as a way of getting out of remote towns by way of transfer.
- 7.7 Teachers have confided to the Union that once you are trapped in a remote area it is often very difficult to even get an interview in a more preferred location. Even if such interviews are achieved, the logistics of accessing the place of interview, not only in terms of cost but also in terms of time, when you don't necessarily want your existing principal or employer to know at the early stage, is problematic for these teachers. Attached to the submission is a letter from a teacher employed in a Catholic school in Bourke in the NSW Diocese of Wilcannia Forbes (Attach 6) setting out the personal and professional difficulties of being employed in such a remote area of the state and noting the differences in conditions for teachers in the Catholic system and those working in government schools. The high level of frustration, disappointment and desperation is very evident.
- 7.8 The NSW branch of the Union reports that the considerable distances facing teaching staff in remote NSW means less access to professional development opportunities and given the considerable cost of either airfares or kilometre allowances (with subsequent travelling/accommodation costs) and the limited resources of a small employer (148 FTE staffing in 1997 for the whole of the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese) teachers are not able to access the same opportunities as their colleagues in other regional or urban areas.
- 7.9 This situation often means that the teachers have to do more with less, try to "catch-up" on latest trends, policies, pedagogies and the like in their own time

which can mean that students are not provided with the same opportunities as their peers in other areas.

- 7.10 IEU Branches have responded to the lack of professional development opportunity for members by developing programs around a range of issues and in some cases, by funding travel, accommodation and teacher relief for them to attend. These are strongly supported by teachers in regional areas. As an example, the Victorian branch, in partnership with the government teachers' union, is holding a two day conference in November through its professional development arm, the Teacher Learning Network (TLN), for primary teachers, year level and student welfare coordinators. The agenda for this conference is attached and includes a number of sessions such as "Health and Welfare Issues for Rural Students" and "Drug Education - Parent Partnerships and Culturally Diverse Communities" intended to reach out to educators who work in regional communities. The TLN runs a program of professional development throughout the year and publishes a journal for schools on current issues (also enclosed). (Attach.7)
- 7.11 The NSW branch has conducted comprehensive inservicing for members throughout NSW relevant to their own knowledge base, safety and responsibilities to students. Of particular importance have been the workshops on the Child Protection legislation and its implications for the industrial and professional rights and obligations for members. Regional workshops have been held in Wollongong, Wagga, Orange, Narabri, Tamworth and Armidale. Approximately 400 members attended the 15 courses offered. Similar workshops have been held on Hazardous Substances in Bathurst, Wagga and Maitland and Career Planning workshops were jointly conducted with the employer in the Canberra Goulburn Diocese. The union recently held Indigenous Workers' seminars in Narrabri and Lismore. The branch conducts annual Womens' and Early Childhood Conferences and regional members are funded for travel, accommodation and teacher replacement costs. These conferences are strongly supported by members.
- 7.12 As indicated above, there are parts of Australia, such as the majority of Queensland, most of Tasmania, and the Northern Territory, that operate as predominantly rural or remote in the provision of education. Teacher shortage issues have always characterised these parts of Australia, but current research indicates that the shortage will extend further. There is an increasing teacher shortage in most parts of Australia, and this is being felt most in country areas. This shortage is not just for specialist areas, which country education has always found harder to attract, but for generalist teachers across the whole P-12 gamut. Barbara Preston's report, commissioned by the Australian Council of Deans of Education, was warning about this three years ago, but little notice has been taken by governments to date.
- 7.13 Even if there were no teacher shortage, the problems of retention in rural areas are staggering. The following comment comes from a teacher who works in a large regional town, 2 hours drive from Melbourne.

"I had to take this term off to recover from an injury, but 5 weeks into this term, my class still does not have a replacement Year 10 English teacher. The principal went to Melbourne to try and recruit some staff over the weekend."

- 7.14 In even smaller towns, the shortage is reaching crisis proportions. One small Victorian Catholic primary school tried to raise their own relocation grant to attract young teachers to their town. This same school has a completely new cohort of teachers that year because of the turnover in staff. Some schools have raised funds so that they can offer some sort of accommodation or pay to install the phone and electricity. In non-government schools, there are few systemic provisions for attraction and retention of teachers.
- 7.15 One of the ways that student teachers experience different educational settings is through placement in different schools. Universities are reluctant to send student teachers too far from their base, because it costs too much to send a lecturer to supervise them. One principal remarked that she hadn't seen a student teacher from Australian Catholic University in 7 years. Even if a young teacher takes up a job in a remote area, the lack of effective networks and properly resourced induction and support can make the experience too isolating and vulnerable.
- 7.16 Unless there are long term, systemic incentives in place in the non-government sector, the difficulties of attracting new (and experienced) teachers to rural areas will continue to compound. Retention of good teachers is also contingent upon there being incentives that encourage staying – e.g. accommodation, bonuses for staying more than one year, support networks for spouses/partners.
- 7.17 To illustrate this, the South Australian branch reports the case of a member who accepted a position as deputy principal in a school in Wyalla. Her husband, however, was unable to find any work, and they were forced for financial reasons to move back to the city, where she found work as a teacher again. Relocation often involves more than one person, yet even where there are incentives, they generally only apply to the school employee. Small schools are too strapped financially to do more than raise a small sum of money, and this just isn't enough.
- 7.18 The accompanying problem with professional development opportunities, is that it is too hard to find a replacement or emergency teacher to release a teacher to attend professional development. Opportunities for professional development are limited in themselves, but there is no incentive to attend a course or upgrade training if you can't find anyone to replace staff.

8. Indigenous Education Issues

- 8.1 Included as part of this submission is a document prepared by the IEU's Indigenous Officer which provides an historical and cultural framework to better understand the difficult educational issues which confront Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs), teachers and indigenous students. (Attach 8)
- 8.2 In relation to the work of AEWs, branches report that while some employed in country dioceses are afforded permanent status, many continue to be employed on a temporary basis from year to year because, according to diocesan employers, the funding may change as it is paid on a per capita basis. The union is of the view that while there may be some legitimacy to an argument that some proportion of teachers might be employed on a temporary or contractual basis

for reasons of fluctuating student numbers, assigning the majority of teachers as temporary is totally unacceptable.

- 8.3 The union's work in this area also shows that AEWs are not always afforded the same access to opportunities of professional development and rarely, if ever, attend inservice events with their colleague teachers or support staff. As well, teachers who take up positions in Aboriginal community schools are generally provided with little or no cross cultural inservicing, little or no access to advisors or consultants who can assist with particular teaching and learning strategies for the particular learning needs of their students, and feel isolated and unsupported in an unfamiliar environment.
- 8.4 An IEU member, who left a Catholic school in Brisbane to take up a teaching position for two years at a non government Indigenous Community school is struggling with a high level of frustration and what she sees as a real sense of the futility of her work. She approached the position with a sense of excitement that it would offer very challenging teaching experiences. However, there was very little information given to her about the school and community environment in the job interview and she now believes that it is very important that new employees are fully briefed on the important domestic and professional differences that living in such a community will entail. The cost of living is high, there is a very real sense of isolation and feeling "stuck" and the incentives provided for staff working in the school are insufficient to cover the expenses incurred as a result of living there, without even considering compensation for isolation etc. The community is a 5 hour drive to Darwin in the dry season and cut off by road in the wet season.
- 8.5 She receives \$25 per week for a remote area allowance, assisted rent (although government school teachers pay no rent), electricity is paid for as is 12 kgs of freight per week for provisions ordered from Darwin. She is entitled to three flights to Darwin and three nights accommodation each year. She has a return trip to Brisbane every two years.
- 8.6 At the present time, her intention is to see out the end of her contract but will then leave. The school is the largest non government aboriginal community school in the country with approximately 400 students on the roll, even though on any one day there may be no more than 100 students who have turned up for lessons. She has 25-30 students in her particular class but on most days, has an average of about 10 students in attendance. Her students are distracted and disinterested and there is little continuity in their attendance, making it almost impossible to build concepts across the core curriculum . It also means developing trust relationships with students to enhance learning is very difficult.
- 8.7 She has personally had one session of professional development on language and literacy which she reported as being very helpful - it provided cross cultural links between aboriginal and english language concepts and allowed her to rethink the way she presented her lessons to the students to make them more culturally relevant. Some other teachers have been away to do professional development and the school then facilitates their sharing of the learning with the broader staff. However, the opportunities for professional development are scarce. She speaks very positively about her colleague staff at the school as being "very supportive and brilliant teachers."

- 8.8 The issue of initial teacher training and ongoing professional development and reskilling in relation to indigenous education is fundamentally important. Few teachers can report that their initial training and qualification has properly prepared them to either teach indigenous students or to provide non indigenous students with an understanding of the history and culture of Australia's indigenous people.
- 8.9 Questions of fairness, equity, social justice and discrimination have to be asked. The teacher has now reached a point of accepting the reality of what can be done - she focuses on those students who turn up every day. Those who attend once a month or even once a week she believes have little hope of achieving even the most basic skills in literacy and numeracy. She is cynical about almost everything related to the position she finds herself in - her students, the community, her employers - and how could anyone blame her for feeling this way. For her students, it is the same. They do not attend school. They learn little. They leave school at the earliest possible time and their levels of literacy and numeracy are very low. Their employment opportunities are almost zero.

9. TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 9.1 There is an expectation that students should be technologically competent, and schools are working hard to connect to the Internet and to other schools through services such as email. There is a strong sense that technology may be able to break down some of the barriers of distance in remote and rural education. In fact, it is probably more imperative that students in remote areas gain access to the diversity and breadth of information and on-line curricula that such technology promises.
- 9.2 In reality, the cost of connection is higher in the country, the infrastructure is generally slower, and country schools are expressing the same criticisms as metropolitan schools – there simply is not enough funding to install, maintain, upgrade, and train in the area of technology.
- 9.3 There are serious issues about equity in this area – if a student does not have a computer at home, or a regional library to access the Internet, they are disadvantaged. In IEU consultations, there was strong criticism of the quality of lines and cables that most schools are utilising – one principal commented that it can take an hour sometimes in her school to download two emails. The frustration of trying to use a slow and inefficient infrastructure for a teaching and learning tool is palpable.

“I can’t guarantee that the TV will work in my classroom, let alone a computer”

- 9.4 There is the additional problem of ensuring that teachers are comfortable with and skilled in new technologies, given both the general ageing of the profession, and the limited opportunities for professional development outlined earlier. Technical support staff are also difficult to find and keep, as staffing schedules do not often allow much flexibility, and school budgets are tight.
- 9.5 It is clear that the new technologies provide opportunities to open up communication and to rethink the way teaching and learning might be organised

to put teachers in touch with one another across the country (and the world). Nevertheless, it is not the panacea but another tool for teachers to add to their range of teaching technologies. The appropriate marrying of pedagogy and IT is fundamentally important.

- 9.6 The Union, however, is particularly concerned that at a policy level, technology will be used to allow employing authorities to abrogate their responsibilities for comprehensive professional development. Opportunities can be explored and developed but in the end, people need to meet with people, particularly those already employed in rural and remote communities.
- 9.7 The Union has done some work to connect our regional and rural members to the union and to each other. The TLN has developed and produced a major resource, "Integrating Technology Enhancing Learning - Across the School. Within the Classroom" (Attached). As well, conference papers and workshop papers are on branch web sites and chatlines have been established on topics such as vocational education and technology to allow as wide a participation as possible. (Attach. 9)

CONCLUSION

For at least ten years of schooling, education is a compulsory endeavour and a fundamental entitlement for all young people. But it is now also widely recognised that the post compulsory years of education are vitally important and that education is a life long pursuit. High quality education provides the foundations for a young person's life chances and for their career opportunities and contributes to the strength and rigour of the nation's public and private institutions. A strong well resourced, publicly funded and equitable education system, incorporating both the government and non government systems, is fundamental and necessary social infrastructure.

What we know from research into the student learning outcomes from schooling, the school retention rates of 15 to 19 year olds in rural and remote communities, reports on indigenous education, the statistics of school leavers participating in post secondary education and training, the statistics on youth unemployment in rural and remote communities, the statistics on youth suicide particularly in rural and remote communities and the general alienation and social dislocation experienced by students and their families in these communities is that Australia's education and training system is failing them. The IEU urges the Commission to use this opportunity to report to the government and to the Australian community about the inequities and discrimination in the provision of education services which exist for rural and remote communities and to make recommendations which redress these to ensure that Australia is meeting its obligations under the international conventions and covenants.

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