



**INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF AUSTRALIA**  
Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street, Southbank, Victoria 3006  
PO Box 1301, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205  
Ph: (03) 9254 1830  
Fax: (03) 9254 1835  
Email: ieu@ieu.org.au

20 December, 2000

Mr Jim Cumming  
Executive Director  
Australian College of Education  
PO Box 323  
Deakin West  
ACT 2600

Dear Jim,

**Ref: National Discussion Paper on Professional Teaching Standards**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the National Discussion Paper on Professional Teaching Standards. The IEU welcomes the current discourse around teacher standards and strongly supports the development of nationally consistent standards for the teaching profession with the aim of incorporating these into a comprehensive system of national registration for the profession.

Such a national scheme has the potential to address a broad framework of issues such as professionally established entry standards, questions of professional ethics, requirements for teacher training courses, ongoing professional development and the capacity for deregistration. Such a nationally consistent set of standards and system of registration arrangements would enhance the standing of the profession and clearly serves the public interest.

Please find attached a preliminary response to the discussion paper. It is expected that a subsidiary paper will be developed in the new year when it will be possible to canvass the views of IEU members more widely.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Rolley  
Federal Secretary

**INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION  
OF AUSTRALIA**

**RESPONSE TO THE  
AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION'S  
NATIONAL DISCUSSION PAPER ON  
PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS**

**DECEMBER, 2000**

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Australian College of Education discussion paper **Standards of Professional Practice for Accomplished Teaching in Australian classrooms**.
- 1.2 The IEU is the federally registered union representing over 46,000 teachers and education support staff in the non-government sector.
- 1.3 Education is an enterprise on a massive scale, the largest industry in Australia in terms of both budget and workforce. It involves a very large number of key stakeholders, ranges across both the public and private sectors and involves policy making at both the federal and state government levels. There are approximately 2,600 (27%) non-government schools across the country, with the sector also comprising early childhood centres, pre schools, long day care centres, English Language Colleges and private training providers.
- 1.4 The 1999 ABS publication 'Schools Australia 1999' shows that 978,976 (30%) full time students attend non-government schools, with the gender distribution across the ages (5 & under to 20 & over) being 50.2% (m) and 49.7% (f).

## **2.0 The role of the union**

- 2.1 The subject of the discussion paper requires extensive consultation with all sections of the educational community. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to contribute to the dialogue and no one group can claim to have the authority to speak definitively on the issue. However, teacher unions nationally have a joint membership in excess of 200,000 and can claim some authority on industrial matters in the same way as professional associations would stake their claim to speak with authority on professional issues or employers on administrative arrangements.
- 2.2 IEU has a known and understood mandate under its Constitution to advance and defend the industrial and professional rights and interests of teachers and support staff in the non-government sector. The IEU Constitution specifically provides that the union should encourage and initiate policies that contribute towards the improvement of the status, training and qualifications of all members of the union.
- 2.3 Education unions negotiating particular industrial issues with employers or other relevant organisations cannot effectively do so without having a deep knowledge and understanding of the professional role and work of its members. Professional issues concerning appraisal, evaluation, standards, induction, probation, promotion, mentoring, collegiality, career paths, the organisation of teaching and learning, organisational restructuring and the provision and implementation of ongoing relevant professional development and skilling are inextricably connected with the industrial rights and responsibilities of teachers and support staff.
- 2.4 The IEU is strongly of the view that issues of teacher quality, teacher satisfaction and morale are related to industrial concerns such as the levels of salary and

conditions, stability, mobility, professional status and recognition, career development, promotional prospects and other work conditions

- 2.5 IEU members strongly support the union's taking a leadership role in education policy debate and development, recognising the strength, independence, commitment and resources that the union brings with its advocacy.

### **3.0 The nature of teachers' work**

- 3.1 Teachers are being asked to undertake a wider variety of tasks and must respond to diverse student populations with greater personal, cultural and social needs than ever before. Teachers must respond to the requirement that more and more issues be covered in the curriculum as well as to changes in education policy which require new work to be done in curriculum, planning, assessment, and school management.
- 3.2 The increasing intensity of teaching with its accumulation of demands and deadlines and the increasing scrutiny through the media and quality assurance reviews have increased the pressure on teachers. As a result of these trends, teachers are less able than ever to adopt a narrow view of their tasks as simply the transmission of pre-set curriculum. Their teaching skills and strategies must be sophisticated and flexible where they make sound professional judgements in often complex situations with specific classes and individual students.
- 3.3 The status of teaching can only be improved by a commitment to the establishment of an improved career structure for classroom teachers. Currently, leadership roles in schools are more heavily focussed on administrative and school leadership. Positions of responsibility which would involve co-ordination of a particular year level or subject area attract only a small allowance or combination of time and payment. Good classroom teachers want to stay in the classroom but the financial and social rewards of doing so are sadly lacking.
- 3.4 The IEU strongly advocates an improvement in the salary and conditions of teachers. Whilst this would certainly make teaching a more attractive profession, the central argument is about the value of the work undertaken by teachers in schools. The reality is that teaching is a highly skilled, highly demanding and stressful profession. It is a profession that requires four (and increasingly five) years of professional training and academic study and continuous learning throughout a career, yet its career opportunities in respect to promotion and financial reward are minimal.

### **4.0 Teacher standards**

- 4.1 It should be said at the outset that a very substantial body of research already exists around the issue of teacher professionalism, the status of teaching, teacher recruitment and teacher pre service training. Since the early 1990s national policy has sought to strengthen Australian schools through key micro-economic reform strategies. The IEU can point to a myriad of national and state committees, projects, forums, reference groups and statutory bodies on which it has participated with other key education industry stakeholders in the development and implementation of policy affecting the work and changing roles of all education workers in schools.

- 4.2 In December 1990, the Schools Council published its seminal report "*Australia's teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade*" which set out a long term agenda for action, based on ideas about how effective teaching can be recognised, supported and rewarded through developing more varied and defined career paths that combine incentives and opportunities for improving teachers' classroom performance. The report was based on an analysis of teachers' work and developed a Charter for Teaching which included the dimensions of ethics, professional work and continuous professional development. In essence, the Charter endorsed the development of standards ie. What teachers should know and be able to do.
- 4.3 This research, together with what can only be described as a mountain of other reports and projects undertaken and published since then, provide direction and advice for the way forward to addressing the problems of the profession's status and morale. The IEU believes that it is not a lack of research, knowledge, understanding or general acknowledgment which are the impediments to improving the status of the profession but a lack of will on the part of government (both federal and state), system and school authorities to give reality to their rhetoric.
- 4.4 In 1996, the Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers received submissions from key stakeholders which painted a picture of an education community struggling to sustain high quality teaching and learning outcomes in the face of rapid and substantial structural change and reform. The outcomes of that Senate inquiry are documented in *A Class Act* (1998) that made recommendations to the Federal Minister in the current government. To date, none of those recommendations have been implemented.
- 4.5 The Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has now established a Taskforce to examine issues of national teacher supply and demand particularly in relation to recruitment of high quality personnel into the teaching profession.
- 4.6 The reality though is that during 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 non government schools, 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.
- 4.7 The IEU strongly believes that the issues of teacher recruitment, training 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 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 immediate attention.

## **5.0 Teacher registration**

- 5.1 Teacher registration is a policy position that has been long held by the IEU. Professional standards are a matter of pride for the profession and form a quality benchmark for employers. Of equal importance is the issue of a public guarantee where by parents know that their children are under the supervision and guidance of teachers who have been licensed to practice. With more than 10% of the teaching service changing jobs, and indeed systems or states, each year a system of national registration is essential.
- 5.2 Teachers and their unions in Australia and overseas have long supported systems of registration to establish proper entry standards and to give teachers a mechanism to participate in determining the essential knowledge and skills base of their profession through the accreditation of pre-service education courses and other standard setting measures.
- 5.3 It is the firm belief of the IEU that a comprehensive national framework of teacher registration will ensure that standards of entry into the profession are established and protected. In the public interest in general and in the interests of students in particular, only qualified teachers should be able to be classroom practitioners. A system of teacher registration recognises that teaching is a profession, with unique knowledge, skills and aptitudes and has the capacity to affirm and enhance the status of the profession.

## **6.0 Professional development**

- 6.1 Educational changes and improvement, by their very nature, require adequate professional development of a high quality. Material provision alone is not enough and the increased surveillance of teachers' work is not the way to proceed.
- 6.2 To date much reform in education has involved the development and distribution of policy and curriculum documents in the belief that these would transform practice in schools. When the anticipated improvements do not appear, policy changes are often made without any evidence being collected about the extent to which the policy has actually been implemented. (Stigler, 1997). The difficulty is that the quick fix usually does not work. What is needed is a long range commitment to changes in teaching practice in which the wisdom of expert teachers forms the foundation on which to build.
- 6.3 The IEU is of the view that employers need to make a firm commitment to the ongoing professional development of staff to ensure that skill levels and professional practice are both maintained and enhanced. It is interesting to note the recent analysis of Ashenden and Milligan (1999) of students undertaking postgraduate research in Australian Universities. Some 23 646 people are enrolled in postgraduate courses within education faculties across the country. Of these 90% had a prior degree and 75% were undertaking their postgraduate studies part time. Teachers already make a strong commitment to further study often with little incentive or financial assistance to do so
- 6.4 The IEU also supports the development of processes for accrediting the knowledge and skills gained in other studies or employment as credit along the

continuum of lifelong teacher education (ie pre service, induction, professional development and promotion). This involves a progressive concentration on the elements of teaching and the need to make teaching explicit.

- 6.5 Professional development of teachers should where possible be considered for advanced standing within the formal postgraduate domain. The opportunities for teachers to undertake postgraduate courses should be encouraged and increased and formal qualifications gained rewarded for salary purposes. Where possible credit should be made available for the successful completion of short courses assuming that the assessment requirements of the university involved are met.
- 6.6 Professional development requires an ongoing, long term commitment with appropriate conditions of work and release from work that nurtures a commitment to reflective practice. Teachers should be encouraged and rewarded for continuing their studies which improve their capacity to research, analyse and critique their work in order to inform the ways in which they may bring about changes in their pedagogy and ways of organizing educational work.

## **7.0 In conclusion**

The IEU believes very strongly that the key issues facing the teaching profession, its status, recruitment, training and employment related matters are already well documented both nationally and internationally. What is needed is political will to implement the many recommendations already made over the last twenty years. The current crisis in education with regards to the status of the profession and the poor appeal it has for many young people as a career choice is the result of political neglect, intransigence and lack of commitment. Investment in the education of the next generation of students is critical to ensure that Australia remains a competitive and just society. A highly trained, highly regarded and well remunerated workforce of teachers is the critical key to this being achieved.

Authorised by

Lynne Rolley

Independent Education Union of Australia

December, 2000