

# Independent Education Union

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Wednesday, 28 February 2024

Hon Jason Clare MP  
Minister for Education

Email: [Minister.Clare@education.gov.au](mailto:Minister.Clare@education.gov.au)

Dear Minister Clare

## **Re: Australian Government Report - *Improving Outcomes for All***

The IEU writes in relation to the federal government's [Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System](#) ahead of the Education Funding and Reform Agreement to be developed this year.

We note that while the Expert Panel has tabled their report as part of the review, the terms of the next Agreement will be finalised pending negotiations with state and territory governments.

Our union acknowledges the extensive consultation undertaken by the government and the Expert Panel in developing their report, including engagement with education practitioners and their unions. Such an open and accessible process stands in stark contrast with government decision making and key policy debates under the previous coalition government.

There is much to be commended in the Expert Panel's report, particularly the emphasis on tackling education inequality and the unacceptable gaps that persist in educational outcomes in this country. The IEU unequivocally supports the panel's recommendation that government schools urgently reach full funding in all jurisdictions.

As you know, the key driver of poor teacher retention rates and staff shortages relates to unsustainable workloads. The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan acknowledges the problem, and appropriately includes specific actions in an attempt to address teacher workload pressures.

Over the past two years, the IEU has worked collaboratively with federal and state education and regulatory authorities to clarify the boundaries of compliance, thereby highlighting the numerous practices that exceed these requirements and intensify workload. This work continues in 2024.

The Expert Panel's report does contain some reference to workload concerns; however, the report largely fails to include specific and enforceable workload interventions at a school or system level.

We acknowledge that the report at least highlights some aspects of the workload crisis:

- The importance of professional learning, mentoring and provision of curriculum resources for teachers (Priority Area 1).
- Access to specialist staff such as dedicated wellbeing coordinators (Priority Area 2).
- Confirmation of increased teacher workloads and work expectations (Priority Area 3).
- The administrative burden that data collection places on school staff and the need to avoid the imposition of new data collection on schools (Priority Area 5).
- Acknowledgement of the impact of constant change in schools and the need for well managed reform programs with realistic timelines for implementation (Priority Area 5).

These inclusions are welcome; however, as thousands of teachers, support staff and school leaders will tell you, they are not enough.

Unsustainable workloads and work intensification are the most pressing workplace issues confronting education employees across the country. The problem is complex and has many dimensions that will not be solved by the federal government alone, or with a single area of reform. School employers have the most immediate ability, and responsibility, to make a real difference to teacher workload and excessive work expectations at the school level.

Yet government policy such as the Education Funding and Reform Agreement can play a crucial role as part of a broader response to excessive workloads. Our union submitted to the Expert Panel the following proposals that would see concrete outcomes linked to the next Agreement:

- A requirement on school employers to provide more than just an acknowledgment of workload. We need employers to genuinely engage with staff and unions to reduce these pressures. Employers must be held to account to demonstrate quantifiable workload change in their schools.
- An issue frequently canvassed with the Panel and at the Ministerial Reference Group related to concerns with excessive compliance and the overlay of duplicative administrative tasks. Such demands are often imposed on staff in excess of what was envisaged by education authorities, as employers (at the system and local level) add additional requirements. Teachers and school leaders are drowning in this paperwork and red tape. The Agreement should enforce minimum compliance requirements whereby employers do not exceed streamlined national standards.
- The Report has six 'targets'. Five of these focus on students realising their potential (4a), with additional targets on student attendance (4b) and workforce diversity (4c). Despite the pervasive workload crisis in schools, the report fails to propose any specific targets relating to workload.
- While the Teacher Workforce Recommendation 4A supports "*..additional time to plan and collaborate and access to mentoring and specialised training..*", there is no corresponding requirement for school employers to action such time or put in place arrangements at the school level. In the absence of the Agreement providing enforceable consequences on employers, such recommendations will remain out of reach for the vast majority of school staff, and in reality, will only occur following action and advocacy by unions and their members.

Minister, the IEU welcomes the many positive aspects of the report, and we note the diverse and competing challenges that need to be managed through a complex national policy framework. Our 75,000 members ask that the issue of unsustainable workloads be elevated to the highest priority in all areas of education policy, including the Education Funding and Reform Agreement.

In the absence of a meaningful intervention on workloads, and genuine commitment by employers to refrain from exceeding compliance requirements, many of the Agreement's worthy objectives will remain unfulfilled as teachers continue to leave the profession in record numbers and schools are unable to fully commit to new student programs due to competing demands and already overburdened teachers and school leaders.

Kind regards



**BRAD HAYES**  
**FEDERAL SECRETARY**