



**AEU**

**STATE BUDGET**

**SUBMISSION**

**2008-2009**



## Introduction

The Victorian Branch of the AEU again welcomes the opportunity to be part of direct community input to the annual budget process on key policy directions. Our submission focuses on high-level policy issues that we feel that the Government should consider not only in the context of the 2008 – 2009 budget but also in the policy development for the current term of government which will have implications for the next decade.

Our submission has a whole-of-government focus as education underpins the prosperity and happiness of all Victorian citizens. It is our submission that a government can be judged by its investment in public education.

Appended to this submission is the document *Education for Everyone's Needs*. This provides the conceptual framework for the policy vision of the union for the next decade. It is the third in a series of vision statements released by the AEU since 1998.

The focus of our concern at this point in time is equity and it relates to the fundamental principle that governments have a primary responsibility to provide a quality education for all. This is essential for a cohesive and democratic society where all citizens are valued and have the opportunity to contribute to our shared future.

For years now this notion has been unfashionable, driven by efforts to shift attention to anything but the increasing gap in life opportunities between the wealthiest and poorest members of our community.

To further this principle we need a public education system that has the resources and policies not just to provide education for everyone but education for everyone's needs.

The public system needs to be dedicated to the educational needs and pastoral care of each and every student. It must ensure that every student's needs are met and that their individual interests are engaged and extended. It must also equip them with the skills needed to participate meaningfully in both working and community life.

The extra resources that are required to provide quality education for all cannot alone come from the dedicated education budgets of state governments. It calls for investment at all levels of government – state, federal and local.

We call for investment from combined government infrastructure funds and to continue the process of co-locating sporting and community facilities and services as well as early childhood education and care services within public school precincts.

Education is a lifelong process and the need of children and their families to access various levels of services and to be connected to relevant community programs and networks is also lifelong.

It makes sense to place schools at the centre of community life.

Our schools are one of the few places our fragmented community meets. It makes perfect sense to co-locate such community and early childhood education and care facilities in the safe environment of a school precinct where children and adults alike can use them. We acknowledge and welcome the Brumby government commitment to include children's hubs in planning for new schools in growth corridors. However, a long term plan is needed to ensure the benefits of this model flow to the whole Victorian community.

### **Getting it right for everyone**

Our public education system is a cornerstone of our society, welcoming all and aiming to provide a high quality education for all. However, there is a significant variation in performance at the lower end of the scale where disadvantage, social dislocation and family crisis are growing trends. This has been confirmed by the recent PISA results which see Australia slipping relative to other nations. Victoria in particular has much to address in this regard. The AEU believes that the challenge is to provide equality of opportunity for all our children to lead successful lives in the twenty first century. To achieve this, the AEU recommends:

- Increasing participation in preschool education
- Addressing the needs of the increasing number of students with behavioural and emotional issues
- Reducing class sizes
- Tackling the teacher shortage
- Identifying, developing and supporting highly skilled school leaders
- Ensuring high quality teaching, supported by quality professional development
- Continued rebuilding of school and preschool infrastructure
- Keeping students engaged in the middle years
- Meeting every student's needs in Years 11 and 12
- Identifying and addressing the needs of students not achieving benchmark standards in literacy and numeracy through the years P-12
- Increasing participation, engagement, educational outcomes and school completion for Indigenous students
- Addressing the skills shortage.

### **The importance of preschool**

The AEU recognises there is much to applaud in the actions and vision of the Brumby government in relation to early childhood education and care.

The critical importance of a preschool education to maximising children's educational outcomes has been acknowledged within *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood*. It has also been recognised in the transfer of preschools (along with other early childhood services) within the Office of Children to the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The AEU welcomes the various strategies of government aimed at supporting improved access and the delivery of a preschool education provided by qualified early childhood teachers to all four year olds. In this context we also welcome the recently announced government scholarships targeted at attracting early childhood teachers to preschool programs in long day care settings. However endeavors to attract and retain highly qualified staff into a variety of service types and locations will fail whilst terms and conditions are lower in some services than others.

The lack of salary parity for early childhood teachers with school teachers continues to be a disincentive to dual qualified early childhood teachers electing to enter and remain in the sector.

Costs associated with early childhood education are often prohibitive for parents in need whose children stand to benefit most from preschool education.

The AEU welcomes the increase to the health card subsidy in preschool to \$730 per annum. However, teachers are still reporting that for some non-health care card holders preschool is still unaffordable and there is an increasing incidence of children being withdrawn from centres because of the inability of families to pay the cost of fees.

We believe that:

- The government should provide preschool education on a free and universal basis for all four year olds as well as three year old children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Funded (free) access for children with additional needs and integration support services is also an important equity initiative.
- The government should develop a strategy, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, for the transmission of employment of early childhood teachers and assistants to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- Recognition should be given to the professional status of preschool teachers and provide salary parity with primary school teachers in order to attract more people to preschool teaching and overcome current shortages.
- All Early Childhood teachers should be registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and early childhood assistants certified.
- A long term plan to address the ageing preschool infrastructure needs to be developed in conjunction with local government and other relevant groups.
- The development and implementation of a curriculum framework (play based, developmental – linked to VELs) should be developed. Funding for professional development should be provided to support the implementation phase.

### **Looking after the vulnerable students**

In Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood, the Victorian government recognises that research provides strong indications that early intervention and support can help families to remain intact and assist children with special needs to thrive. It also acknowledges that some children with additional needs are missing out on early intervention services. We agree that "this risks setting these

children on a negative trajectory in life, leading to poor outcomes at school that are difficult to redress and manage.” The Victorian government must develop a more robust and efficient system of early intervention that can respond to growing demand.

Research shows that resources put into children for their education and well being will reap long term rewards for the individual and society as a whole. The social problems that are confronted by disadvantaged students are complex and there is no easy solution to this problem, but the AEU supports a number of measures that need to be adopted in order to address the needs of disadvantaged students:

- Increasing school funding with a particular focus on increasing funding for schools with students most in need. Victoria is the lowest funding education state in Australia and greater investment is needed. In particular, we propose that the equity component of the Student Resource Package (SRP) be increased to 5% to target schools most in need
- Restoring and expanding the provision of special setting education for students with learning and/or behavioural difficulties and for other students needing alternative education
- Increasing funding to early intervention programs to support the employment of early childhood teachers to ensure every child has access to an early childhood education which best meets their needs and supports their participation in universal early childhood education and care programs
- Continuing assistance in literacy and numeracy programs if needed for students facing difficulties beyond the early years
- The continuation of the Primary Welfare Program and call for it to be extended
- Linking schools with community services to provide counselling and support for families under stress
- Development of an early warning system for parents relating to absenteeism, disruptive behaviour, bullying or poor academic results so that parents can be part of the solution.

### **Indigenous Education**

The continuing educational disadvantage faced by indigenous students is reflected by:

- Low participation in preschool education
- Poor retention rates throughout the formal years of schooling
- Limited involvement in post compulsory education
- Poor literacy and numeracy skills.

The AEU applauds the Brumby government for the support given to facilitation of Koorie Early Childhood teachers through the provision of funding for a scholarship program and the initiative with the Wathaurong aboriginal cooperative and Deakin University. This is a good beginning. However, there is a need for the state government to supplement the Commonwealth EIP funding and work with the Commonwealth to ensure timely provision of resources.

Further, an extension of the program to employ more Community Liaison officers who would involve indigenous parents working in partnership with schools to improve academic outcomes and keep indigenous students engaged is needed. The Indigenous Education workforce should be extended and more positions need to be

made ongoing. The current casual nature of positions has placed staff under stress and makes it very difficult for staff to engage with local communities and to develop strong relationships. Professional training and ongoing professional learning opportunities need to be provided and resourced. Initiatives need to be developed to encourage Indigenous people to take up teaching.

The AEU also calls for indigenous culture, language and social inclusion to be covered in teacher pre-service training and teacher professional development.

### **We need to attract and retain the best teachers**

The basic ingredient of a quality public education system is quality teachers. One of the major issues confronting education in Victoria is a short supply of teachers across all sectors – early childhood, schools and TAFE. The supply situation is becoming acute in certain subjects, industries and geographical areas. As at June 2007, 19.6% of school teachers were employed on short term contracts; contract and casual employment is even higher in TAFE. In fact, the level of contract employment in schools is higher than it was for most of the Kennett years. This is very discouraging for new entrants who start in the profession with poor conditions and no job security. This is cited by new teachers as a major reason for leaving the profession.

School teachers in Victoria are the lowest paid teachers in the nation. A comparison with NSW, with whom we share a long border, shows a significant and growing gap. For teachers at the top of the scale the gap is 11% (\$7040) and at the start 6.3% (\$2933). This will widen in January 2008 when NSW teachers receive a further 4% to 15% and 10.3% respectively.

In addition, the OECD 2006 report “Education at a Glance” confirms that Australian teachers are not well paid by international standards, particularly those experienced teachers at the top of the scale.

Principals report they have increasing difficulty finding suitable relief teachers. Experienced Victorian CRTs are paid \$76.40 per day less than their NSW colleagues. This needs to be addressed.

Recent reports confirm applications for teaching places have plunged by 30 per cent over two years in Queensland, and Western Australia is unlikely to fill places for the coming year. In Victoria, applications for entry in 2007 and 2008 were down 12 per cent, after increasing by 2.5 per cent the previous year.

As a result, entry scores are decreasing. This situation is unacceptable if we are to ensure a quality teacher workforce into the future. Teaching is clearly becoming an even less attractive career.

This comes on top of the Teacher Supply and Demand Report that indicates a secondary teacher shortfall of 500 per year for the next 3 years. In addition, many teachers are teaching outside their area of qualification.

We need to do more to attract quality school teachers; we need them to be properly qualified in the subjects they teach; we need to keep them in the profession. To achieve this, we recommend the following initiatives:

- Significantly reduce the percentage of school teachers on short term contracts
- Provide the best salary and conditions for teaching staff in Australia
- Improve incentives for those choosing teaching after experience in other careers
- Increase full-time ongoing employment opportunities in TAFE.

Initiatives to attract and retain Early Childhood teachers are outlined earlier in our submission (see page 3).

### **Supporting our teachers**

It is not enough just to attract people to the teaching profession. Teachers need to consistently develop their skills and professional development initiatives need to be supported and expanded. The strategies in the Blueprint Leadership program must continue and be further developed. Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood acknowledges the importance of building the professionalism of the early years workforce to underpin quality improvement in early years services. It advocates for the requirement for all new ECEC staff to hold at least a post secondary school early childhood qualification by 2016 and all ECEC centres to employ a four-year trained teacher

We also recommend that:

- Funding and time release provision be made for enhanced professional development opportunities for preschool teachers and early childhood assistants, delivered separately and in conjunction with primary teacher colleagues
- The time available for professional development related to current school initiatives be increased by at least two additional pupil free days per annum
- Additional time/CRT release for professional development within schools be provided
- The currency of TAFE teachers' industry and professional knowledge and experience be maintained
- Enhanced professional development including mentoring be provided to support principals in their leadership roles
- Provision be made for enhanced professional development opportunities for all teachers including casual relief teachers
- The Rural Retraining Program should be expanded to enable more special school teachers to gain their Special Education Qualifications.

High quality teaching can be strengthened by:

- Ensuring a qualified teacher for every class within preschool programs, schools and TAFE
- Removing routine administrative tasks and letting teachers focus on their most important work – teaching. The Brumby government commitment to 300 secondary teacher assistants over 4 years is a welcome initiative. However, we call for this initiative to be brought forward and significantly expanded
- Providing increased funding for ICT resources and training for early childhood teachers and assistants.



The Review of the Children's Services Centre Regulations and Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood espouse the importance of qualified staff to quality provision and advocate for all staff to have as a minimum a Certificate III in Children's Services. The AEU endorses this objective. However it is imperative that in introducing these improved requirements that assistance and support is provided to staff to enable this to occur. To achieve this we recommend the following initiatives:

- Funding to facilitate the availability of sufficient Certificate III courses geographically accessible to staff
- Funding to services to support availability of the time and resources (such as time release, relief staff and assistance with course costs) to support their participation.

### **Continue the restoration of school infrastructure**

Our own research tells us that a major factor influencing parents' decisions about choosing a school is the quality of its buildings and facilities. In Victoria, we are confronted with a situation where many of our schools are in need of a major upgrade in facilities. There are still portable classrooms in many schools that are used as permanent buildings. It is in this context that the government's commitment to a ten year plan to rebuild and modernize school infrastructure is very welcome. We congratulate the government for this policy commitment to address thirty years of neglect. The \$1.9b over the next four years provides a solid start to this process.

It is essential that the quality of the rebuild/modernization is of a high standard to ensure the benefits to school communities are enduring. It is also imperative that any new infrastructure be maintained to ensure its durability over a long period of time.

Building schedules for Primary, Secondary and Special schools need to be reviewed and reflect what is required for teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition, support and professional learning need to be provided for teachers working in these new settings.

### **An ongoing commitment to meet everyone's needs**

Education is a process that takes place over time and builds on previous learning. Formal education is designed to equip people with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to experience success throughout their lives. It should also instill a desire and capacity to engage in life-long learning so people continue to grow as individuals. Public education must provide an integrated learning experience from the building blocks of preschool education through to the senior years of school which enable young people to develop the knowledge and skills to pursue a life and career pathway of their choice.

### **We need to build the foundations in the early years by:**

- Guaranteeing universal access to preschool
- Uncrowding the curriculum
- Focusing on literacy and numeracy throughout schooling

- Supporting all students.

**We need to keep students engaged in the middle years by:**

- Connecting primary and secondary schools to better facilitate student transition
- Reducing class sizes to a maximum of 20
- Reducing the number of teachers students have contact with in the middle years
- Timetabling subjects for more sustained in-depth learning
- Facilitating teaching in professional teams
- Providing time and resources for all teachers in the middle years to work together developing curriculum and assessment material
- Providing access to pastoral care and welfare support for every student.

**We need to meet every student's needs in Years 11 and 12 by:**

- Ensuring the VCE curriculum caters for all, not just those students aiming for a university place
- Developing co-operative relationships/direct links between TAFE and Year 10-12 providers to increase opportunities for students
- Providing a range of vocational options for students
- Reducing class sizes to a maximum of 20.

**Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETIS) program funding**

We need to ensure schools receive appropriate funding in order that students are offered a broad range of pathways in the senior years. Senior students must be engaged in meaningful education experiences that lead them to develop the right knowledge and skills to pursue the life and career pathways of their choice. In this context, the AEU is particularly concerned about the gradual reduction in funding for the VETIS program over recent years. The indicative funding allocations for 2008 represent a reduction of over 10% in comparison to actual allocations in 2007. This discrepancy is driven by a projected 12% increase in enrolments with the funding base only increased by 1-2%. The resulting higher cost for students is a barrier to accessing VET programs. For the needs of all senior students to be met the funding model for VETIS needs to become reflective of the numbers of students who wish to pursue vocational training as part of their post compulsory education.

**Support for schools engaged in mergers**

The AEU notes the significant financial commitment made to begin the process of rebuilding and modernising our school infrastructure. Though the Building Futures process many schools have sought to enhance educational provision in their community and some school communities have resolved to merge in order to offer the breadth and depth of curriculum required by both their current students and those into the future.

The merging of schools is at the forefront of the government's desire for communities to make decisions about the best arrangements for local education provision. It is a unique and difficult process with staff and schools requiring additional support in

bringing schools together. In particular, the AEU is concerned that staff lack certainty in terms of their entitlements and employment protections due to issues arising from the merger. Schools lack certainty in relation to their Student Resource Package allocations. The AEU calls on the government to provide improved and appropriate support for staff and schools when mergers occur and in the years following.

### **Supporting teachers and schools in implementing the Ultranet**

The need to equip our students with skills so they can experience success throughout their lives will be enhanced by the implementation of the Ultranet initiative. By improving the links between teachers, students and parents, schools will be better able to engage students in their learning and provide clear and constructive feedback in a more immediate fashion. However, linking 1.5 million users through the Ultranet provides tremendous challenges for schools and staff. The AEU calls on the government to:

- provide extensive and on-going professional development to enable staff to implement the Ultranet, including additional student free days
- provide increased funding for ICT hardware for schools to ensure they are Ultranet ready
- recognise through the certified agreement negotiations the workload implications and productivity gains of implementing Ultranet as well as the ongoing workload impact due to the significant change required to teacher work.

### **Enterprise Bargaining**

2008 is the year of enterprise bargaining in Preschools, TAFE and Schools. This must be a priority, in the context of this submission, for the Victorian State Budget.

### **TAFE**

Victoria continues to ignore the funding crisis facing the most productive TAFE system in Australia. On every benchmark figure Victoria leads the country, but not in funding. We remain between 12% to 15% behind the national average with no indication of a change in direction. The State government cannot continue to ignore the plight of the system and fail to address the widening salary disparity with NSW and the other states.

Victoria must address the issues surrounding the skills shortage by attracting teachers into the system and retaining them into the future. The starting salaries are \$19000 behind that of NSW and for regional Institutes close to the border this is having a major recruitment and retention impact.

These problems are further compounded by a user choice model which moves funds from the public to the private sector. The AEU does not support public funds being directed to private providers to the detriment of the public system.

The above trends have increased the need for fee for service activity, sometimes placing this training outside the reach of many Victorians. Many young people face high costs, fees and living costs which contribute to the increasing level of hidden

student poverty.

### **Casualisation**

Official figures indicate that out of a workforce of 14000 TAFE teachers, 8000 are employed casually. How can the “education revolution” happen with this appalling statistic? The AEU acknowledges some need for casual teachers but not at the existing levels. A 15% figure of actual teachers is a far more realistic and manageable level for the system while maintaining high teaching standards.

### **Professional Development**

Failure of the Institutes to commit to adequate workforce planning has led to the current shortages for many categories of teachers. Professional development needs to be managed from the centre and the TAFE Development Centre is ideally placed to deliver on the professional needs of the workforce in a coordinated and objective manner. State government funding needs to be directed there and not to the TAFE Institutes who have failed to use the funds to best advantage of the workforce.

The Victorian government must take more responsibility for the system and move more control back to the centre. The experiment with a decentralised model has not delivered the benefits the Victorian community needs and demands. The actions and objectives of the Institutes is often at odds with the needs of the system and the State. A ridiculous competition policy has grown within the system which produces cost inefficiencies, waste, poor delivery outcomes and a culture of “we know best.”

The Victorian Community demands a better and more accountable TAFE system than has been provided to date.

### **Support for Lifelong Learning**

The Victorian government needs to:

- Lift Victorian funding to TAFE up to the national average within three years to provide more places, more teachers and better facilities
- Increase the number of places for identified skills shortage areas
- Improve the range of courses locally available
- Improve pathways between schools and TAFE, and TAFE and higher education
- Reduce casualisation.

### **Providing for adults with formal educational needs**

#### **Funding and Workforce Planning**

Instructors and Educators in the Adult Training and Support Services provide education and training to Victorians with a disability. This type of teaching is both difficult and demanding on the instructor with high levels of assault and danger to the staff in the workplace. Their work is undervalued and under paid. All of the Department of Human Services’ advice and workforce planning indicates recruitment and retention are real issues today for the sector. We need an industry-wide review of

salaries and the work requirements to address the decline in the workforce.

The professional requirements of the job are not matched by the salary outcomes. There is little recognition of the need for up-skilling and almost no funding mechanism to address professional development and reward staff who attain qualifications. It is the AEU who has pushed the issue of qualifications at every enterprise bargaining negotiations with little interest from employers or DHS.

#### Occupational Health and Safety

Person-centred planning will increase the range and diversity of activities and the risk to staff. In addition to addressing the career structure of the workforce, we need to revisit the client to staff ratios and to provide adequate training to instructors in order to deal with challenging behaviors and provide a safe and effective workplace.

The AEU calls on the government to:

- Improve instructor/trainee ratios
- Provide additional training for staff in dealing with challenging behaviours.

#### AMES

Newly-arrived migrants, including refugees from the world's trouble spots, generally need formal teaching in English once they arrive in Australia. The Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) provides these people with intensive language, literacy and numeracy training so they can manage effectively and become productive citizens in their new country.

The importance of English language education for newly-arrived migrants becomes even more important given the Federal Government's cuts to ethnic specific welfare services, with a view to forcing them into generalist community services. A matter of some concern in this contest is the relative decline in salary levels for AMES teachers compared with their peers in schools. As a matter of urgency:

- The government should restore wage parity with school teachers.