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Blueprint 2 Discussion Papers

AEU RESPONSE

Introduction

The AEU welcomes government initiatives which support and enhance public education in Victoria. For this reason we see the reform agenda as set out in the Blueprint 2 Discussion Papers, in so far as it will strengthen the quality of the public system of schools and early childhood services, as a positive and encouraging development. Our caveats relate to the lack of detail about specific measures set out in the Discussion Papers, concern about some of the proposals, the need for an effective and properly resourced implementation process and any potential increase in the workload of teachers, principals and support staff as a result of Blueprint 2 changes. We believe there should be a single Blueprint 2 document reflecting the concept of one unified system from 0-18 as set out in the current three papers.

Overview Discussion Paper

The AEU supports the four intended 'outcomes' for early childhood and school education identified as the aims of the new Blueprint:

- "Improved educational, health and wellbeing outcomes for all young Victorians;
- An accessible, high quality and coherent universal service system for early childhood and education, with targeted support for those who need it;
- Enhanced public confidence in a world class school education system and high quality early childhood services and programs for all;
- Reduced effects of disadvantage on children and young people's learning and development."

We are disappointed however, that the outcomes do not explicitly use the terms 'public education' and 'government schooling' as these systems underpin any socially inclusive and democratic view of education and must be the first priority of the government.

The AEU supports the notion of a 0-18 integrated education system. The 'lifecycle approach' to learning which breaks up learning and development into three broad stages:

early childhood (0-8), the middle years (8-16) and youth transition (16+) makes educational sense and has the potential to improve the various transitions which students undergo as they proceed through the education system. Any implications of creating these stages in terms of the organisation of education, the role (and qualifications) of education staff and the existing curriculum are not spelt out in the Discussion Papers. The lack of detail in this area, as in many other aspects of the papers, is frustrating. If the stages do have intended flow-on effects then further consultation on these matters should occur before they are set in stone in an official Blueprint document.

One of the strengths of the Discussion Papers is the commitment to developing strategies to remove barriers between school and preschool education. The inclusion of early childhood provision as part of an expanded education Department is a key step in this process and a long overdue reform strongly supported by the AEU. We believe that one barrier which needs to be removed is the salary and conditions differentials between fully qualified school and early childhood teachers – this should be a logical consequence of the expanded Departmental structure and other measures proposed for the new Blueprint.

We wonder why the logic of amalgamating schools and early childhood education services into one Department was not similarly followed through at the other end of education provision. It would make a lot more sense when introducing a 16-18 youth transition stage (with government rhetoric about post-compulsory pathways and 'VCE or an equivalent'), if TAFE was also part of the Department of Education rather than being incorporated into a different bureaucratic structure. At the very least the document should address the issue of school/TAFE interface in the youth transition process.

The AEU is pleased to see that the Papers emphasise a cooperative relationship between Victoria and the Commonwealth Government. We support 'cooperative federalism', which should mean that decisions are mutually agreed between the states and the Commonwealth, rather than the Commonwealth using its purse strings to dictate to the States. The command and control federalism used by the previous Federal Government resulted in a waste of Federal funds on ideologically-based programs which ignored the real needs of public education systems. The Commonwealth Government's resources should play an important role in the Blueprint improvement agenda.

Further, we give conditional support to the idea of a 'national' approach to schooling and early childhood development where it can be demonstrated that improved outcomes for all children and young people will result. The conditions of our support are that the public system is not undermined, that the professional role of teachers as educational leaders and experts is not compromised and that a national approach allows sufficient flexibility at the state and local levels for local needs to be met and new ideas generated. Any national guidelines relating to standards and their assessment should be broad enough to allow this level of flexibility.

The AEU supports the nine 'cross-sectoral actions' outlined in the Overview Paper and particularly commends proposals to develop forums and invest in joint professional learning between primary schools and early childhood services and to increase

networking and transition between these sectors. The one proposal which arouses our concern comes under system development and reform: 'publish information on provider performance and broaden parental choice'. If this idea is mishandled through the use of league tables or other unfair comparisons it could do untold harm to either parts of or the whole of our public education system and early childhood education and care sector.

We have no objections to any of the 14 listed 'improvement targets and progress measures'. Although we note that only four of the 14 measures have numerical targets. We further note that one of the Labor Government's longstanding numerical targets of 90% of young people in Victoria successfully completing Year 12 or its equivalent by 2010 has disappeared to be replaced by the vague measure to 'further lift the Year 12 or equivalent completion rate'. The Blueprint should acknowledge the abandonment of this target, explain why it has not been reached and include another numerical target (and the steps to achieve it) for this important measure of system improvement. Many of the other measures look more like good intentions than measurable outcomes. We would recommend that a commendable measure such as 'increase the community confidence in public schooling' should have a numerical target attached to it. A target should indicate a percentage increase in the proportion of students who attend a government school at the end of the five year plan. Additional measures should include numerical targets for:

- improvements in the funding of government schools and early childhood education as compared to the Australian average
- class size reductions in government schools and preschools,
- fixed term contract reductions in government schools,
- improvements in the attrition rates of teachers in their first five years of teaching,
- a reduction in the proportion of schools with teachers teaching outside their areas of qualifications and expertise and
- improvements in the attraction and retention rates of early childhood education teachers.

School Reform Discussion Paper

(Proposals which affect both schools and early childhood are commented on in this section)

The AEU supports the Paper's rationale for a new five year plan – the need to address 'the significant gaps in performance in some regions, in some areas and within some schools'. We would link this rationale directly to the fourth objective of the plan: 'Reducing the effects of disadvantage on early childhood and education outcomes'.

We are pleased to see in this Paper (as compared to the Overview Paper) that the centrality and importance of the government school system is given recognition in the four objectives of the plan: 'Enhance public confidence in a world class education system for all young Victorians that has a strong and vibrant government school system at its core'.

We believe that the final Blueprint 2 document should have a more extended and explicit statement about the role of the public school system in the state's social and economic life, something similar to the statement in Blueprint 1:

"In this challenging context [of current social and economic circumstance and demands], government schools have a unique role. They accept all students, cater for all needs, and serve all communities. Governments have a key responsibility for ensuring that government schools deliver an excellent education and achieve quality outcomes for all their students.

The Victorian Government believes that all school students are entitled to an excellent education and a genuine opportunity to succeed, irrespective of the school they attend, where they live or their home background. The delivery of an excellent education to all students across all areas of the state is the challenge that the Victorian government sets for our government school system". (Blueprint for Government Schools, 2003: pp 7-8)

As well as setting out its philosophical position and its plans for educational changes, it is also important for the Government to take some concrete enabling measures to improve government schools. This means a commitment to additional resource provision through funding increases. According to the Productivity Commission Victoria has spent the least per head on government schools of all states and territories for more than a decade. In 2005-06, the most recent figures publicly available, funding per FTE (fulltime equivalent) government-school student in Victoria was \$10,352 - \$891 below the national average. Victorian funding is \$927 per student below NSW, considered the most comparable state in terms of demographics and staff-to-student ratios. The Government should commit itself to funding government schools at the Australian average or higher by the end of the five year Blueprint 2 period and that this include a significant increase in equity funding to redress disadvantage.

System Development and Reform Proposals

Student Progress

- Work with other states on a national curriculum
- Develop detailed strategies in the priority areas of maths, science and languages
- Strengthen the capacity of schools to measure and improve progress of individuals and cohorts of students, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- Develop better data to measure and report the progress of individual students.

The AEU supports the general direction of these proposals. In all cases the policy outcomes should be the result of substantial consultation with teachers and principals at the school level. Unless there are adequate compensating resources, new policies should not be add-ons to the existing requirements in these areas; if something is added then something else should be removed. Overall the changes should lead to a reduction in the already over-loaded workload of teachers, principals and SSOs.

In terms of the last two dot points, the AEU believes that measuring performance is not the same as improving it. Scarce resources should be used strategically, on improvement strategies rather than accountability requirements. The core task must remain accommodating and addressing the needs of all students and facilitating their learning progress. The justification for any measurement strategy is the value of its contribution to this task. Once assessment management begins to overwhelm the classroom learning

program, student learning time is reduced, learning outcomes are narrowed and teacher workload is increased.

One of the first things which should be done to develop 'better data' to measure and report student progress is to move beyond a reliance on NAPLAN-type testing as the best and most reliable form of student assessment. This data is narrowly-focused and designed primarily for systemic quality assurance rather than individual student progress. In terms of systemic quality assurance, the AEU supports random sample testing rather than full cohort testing. This would provide systemic data without the invasiveness of the current system and would be significantly less costly in terms of scarce education dollars. Accurate data on student progress must come from a classroom-based comprehensive assessment program. The existing reporting process should be reviewed so that schools have more flexibility in reporting student achievement and needs to parents.

We have major concerns about putting all of the state's curriculum development resources into maths, science and languages, given that the new Blueprint is supposed to provide a plan of priorities for the next five years. The other key areas of the curriculum should also be addressed. A balance is needed between the development of a national curriculum and the existing curriculum presently being implemented in schools. Any national curriculum should not require another root-and-branch 'reform', which makes VELS and its resources obsolete, and be broad enough to enable school-based decision-making to meet student needs.

One proposal we would recommend in literacy is the extension of reading recovery (or equivalent programs) support beyond Year 1. There is substantial evidence that some students will only realise their potential and develop their competence in literacy if they receive one-to-one and small group support over an extended period of time during their primary school years. There should also be similar concentrated support programs for individual students in primary schools experiencing difficulties in mastering numeracy skills. These practical measures would help to lift student performance in the disadvantaged groups which the new Blueprint will target. They are ways of providing additional support to students whose families cannot afford to pay for the option often used by more affluent families - private tutoring.

Transitions to and from School

- A new learning and development framework for children 0-8 linked to existing frameworks
- Consistent approaches to assessment on school entry and in the early years of school
- 'Transition plans' for all children starting school
- Consistent data systems across early childhood services and schools
- A seamless system of support services 0-18, including consistent support for Koorie students and those with a disability
- Promotion of pathway packages of VCE and/or VCAL subjects for specific industries and entry into the VET sector
- Expansion of school responsibility for young people until they complete Year 12 (or equivalent) or turn 19

The AEU welcomes proposals which improve transition between different stages of education. We are particularly supportive of initiatives to improve the pathways between schools and early childhood education. In theory all of these proposals seem to have some merit, however the lack of detail in the Paper makes it difficult to comment in any depth about them. For example, the new 0-8 learning and development framework seems like a sound idea, particularly if it reflects existing good professional practice and provides a useful outline of how to facilitate the progress of children through the various phases of learning from 0-8, and is consistent with existing guidelines such as VELs. The new framework should be flexible and provide broad parameters of advice rather than detailed requirements. It should be developed in consultation with both the schools and early childhood sectors. It should be child-focussed and holistic in approach and reflect the centrality of play in children's learning. Within this context we oppose any curriculum based on formal assessment prior to schooling.

It is important to have consistent data systems across early childhood services and schools. At present this is not the case and issues such as the supply and demand of teachers in primary schools and preschools, where many teachers have dual qualifications, can only be addressed by consistency and transparency in data systems. Consistent data transfer about students between preschools and primary schools would be another important initiative. In order to achieve these aims there will need to be a funding commitment to a major upgrade of the ICT resources in preschools. This will not only include hardware and internet connections but ongoing support for maintenance, upgrading and staff training. We support any improvement in the integration of information and services across the 0-18 age spectrum for students from disadvantaged groups so that they do not need to be constantly re-assessed and individuals do not fall between the many transition cracks on their educational journey. While industry pathway packages for VCE/VCAL to facilitate entry into the VET sector seems to be a re-badging of what has occurred in the past, we believe it is important to also get the transition at this stage of schooling right. Again, the paper needs to address the school/TAFE interface to more comprehensively address the transition continuum.

We support the concept of 'transition plans', providing that they are not reliant on the testing of preschool aged children and the associated workload issues are addressed. What is meant by 'consistent approaches to assessment' and the 'expansion of school responsibility' for young people require further explanation before any meaningful comment can be made.

Accountability

- 'Stronger interventions and more intensive monitoring' of underperforming schools
- 'Greater incentives and responsibilities' for high performing schools
- Mentoring and incentives for 'adequately performing' schools to encourage improvement
- Clear standards for what parents can expect from government schools including access to 'the full range of offerings of a contemporary curriculum'
- Provision of information that allows parents to assess school performance against the standards.

The AEU recognises the importance of accountability in schools and school systems. The eminent Harvard educationist Richard Elmore noted that *"...all good accountability systems have very strong reciprocity principles. The way I state that is for every unit of performance I require of you, I have an equal and opposite responsibility to provide you with a unit of capacity. It's important to acknowledge that teachers aren't sitting around schools holding back their best practices waiting for someone to force them to use them through some kind of external pressure. People in schools for the most part are working at or close to their capacity to do what they're being asked to do". (Professional Voice, Vol 5 No 1,2007)*

We would urge caution about the use of terms such as 'underperforming schools'. The pejorative connotations of this description may not be conducive to achieving any substantial improvement in the performance of a school. "Performance" must be considered in the broader social/resource context. The current terminology is in danger of punitively labelling schools outside this context. It is also important to have a broadly accepted definition of 'underperforming', one which does not just reflect the student background characteristics and location of the school. Our assumption is that 'stronger intervention' means greater support rather than any punitive approach to the school or its staff. Schools which may fall into this category are often the hardest schools in the state to work in and require concrete measures involving additional resources, such as lower class sizes, to make a difference. The hard work of staff in these schools should be recognised and not in any way denigrated.

We support the proposal to provide all students in government schools with access to 'the full range of offerings of a contemporary curriculum'. Schools must be provided with the (staffing and other) resources to make this a reality. Any proposal to provide parents with data about school performance should adamantly rule out school league tables as inimical to system and school performance. Data available to parents about a school's performance should be broad and inclusive and recognise the diverse nature of the schools which make up the government system. This same principle must be applied to the information and data available to parents in relation to early childhood education and care services.

Non-Government schools

- Provision of more support through better access to government resources including curriculum materials, PD opportunities, facilities and 'additional funding'
- Clearer expectations and standards for improvement through a 'refined' accountability system
- Better information to parents about student progress and outcomes.

The AEU believes that non-government schools should be properly accountable for the considerable public resources they receive from the state and federal governments. The fact that non-government schools have compulsory fees (which help to define their 'independence') should not mean that their accountability should be any less (or any less transparent) than that for government schools. Given the situation where 60% of Catholic schools and 25% of 'independent' schools are funded above their SES Commonwealth entitlement, and the Federal Government proposes to maintain this system for the next

four years, and the fact that non-government schools enjoyed a funding bonanza under the Howard Government (44% increase 1995 -2005 as compared to 27% for government schools), the AEU does not see any justification for an increase in State Government funding for non-government schools.

Workforce Reform Proposals

Developing teachers and school leaders

- Development and accreditation of principals and school leaders
- Development of 'an instructional model' for high quality teaching, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- Supporting teachers and schools in the use of technology including the Ultranet
- Joint professional learning opportunities between schools and children's services

Once again many of these proposals are difficult to comment on due to a lack of detail. We assume however, that consultation with the AEU will occur regarding any form of Blueprint 2 'workforce reform' as it applies in both the early childhood and school sectors. It is unclear what 'accreditation' of principals and leaders means. We would hope that it does not mean a repeat of the discredited accreditation processes used during the Kennett years. We are also in the dark regarding the term 'instructional model'. Is this just another americanism or is there a difference which should be spelt out between 'teaching' and 'instructing'? We would oppose any proposal which undermines the professional work of teachers. While the Ultranet and other technological developments may provide identifiable educational and professional benefits, their introduction must be properly resourced. Implementation should not be at the expense of teacher time and workload. Schools and teachers must receive proper technical support and professional development as part of a fully-resourced technology implementation plan. The AEU strongly supports properly resourced joint professional learning opportunities between schools and preschools – something which is long overdue. Issues of funding, coordination, time, travel, supply and funding of relief teachers and rural access all need to be addressed by the DEECD to enable this proposal to realise its potential for improvement.

The AEU also supports the expansion of the current Teacher Assistants Program as part of the process of enhancing the teaching and learning process.

Attracting and Rewarding Teachers

- Improved teacher training
- Encouragement of non-teaching graduates to enter teaching
- Motivation and rewards for high performing teachers and school leaders
- Higher salaries for teachers and school leaders to work in schools where they are most needed
- 'Support [for] teachers who have become disengaged to leave the profession, after appropriate opportunities and support have been provided to lift teaching practice'.
- Better use of non-teaching staff.

It is difficult to comment on the teacher training proposal because of the lack of detail. There have been many many reviews of teacher training, both at the state and federal levels, over the past decade and each one produced its own recipe for improvement. There would seem to be little point in yet another review. Identification, analysis and dissemination of existing good practice would be a more productive option. We would be opposed to any 'reforms' which could lead to a downgrading in teacher education course quality or the qualifications that the courses produce. The AEU's attitude to a *Teach First/Teach for America* program will depend on the exact nature of any Victorian scheme. Issues which we may have concerns about include: the selection process for participants, the adequacy of any upfront (summer school) training, the school support processes for participants, workload/time for mentors, salary and conditions for participants, the nature of the qualification participants would gain and the DEECD requirements for identification of a *Teach First* vacancy at a school.

The proposal to pay higher salaries for some teachers and school leaders 'to work in those schools where they are needed most' raises a whole host of issues, many of which relate to our comments earlier about 'underperforming' schools. The AEU has agreed to Executive Principals as a mechanism for broadening the pool of school leaders available in certain circumstances. However, the notion that one person or a few persons will arrive in an "underperforming" school, on far higher salaries than the existing staff, in order to turn the school around has the potential to create inter-staff tensions and a lack of team work. Existing staff may believe that their hard work over many years is being ignored and denigrated by this strategy. A more constructive approach would include putting more resources and support into these schools. Additional promotion positions may also be appropriate – these would be merit selected.

The proposal to facilitate 'disengaged' teachers to leave the profession needs to be handled carefully by all concerned. Again the terminology appears punitive and there is no exploration of the causes behind any "disengagement". In Queensland during a similar scheme the Minister made a statement in the media about clearing out 'dead wood'. If the proposal is a genuine career change program then the processes involved should enable teachers to leave the teaching profession and gain support in entering a new career. The support should involve financial incentives and career outplacement services. Any program of this kind should not create or exacerbate teacher shortages, be based solely on substituting cheaper teachers for more expensive ones, negatively stereotype the departing teachers or create the same type of situation which happened in Brisbane where 'disengaged' government school teachers found jobs soon after in non-government schools (how 'disengaged' were they?).

The proposal to 'make better use of non-teaching staff' needs to be spelt out and worked through with the AEU. We do not support non-teachers doing the professional work of a registered teacher. However we do support the expansion of the Teacher Assistant Program to free teachers to focus on their professional work.

Partnerships with Parents and Communities

- Parental access to information through the Ultranet,

- Guidance to families about how they can support their child's learning,
- Schools being developed into 'children's and community hubs' and
- Closer links between schools and early childhood services.
- Partnerships between schools and businesses,
- Closer links between the DEECD and LLENS

The AEU has long supported the involvement of parents in schools and preschools as a means of enhancing the educational outcomes for students. We therefore welcome initiatives which provide parents with more information about their child's education and guidance about how they can work with their child at home to reinforce and support the learning development which is happening at school or preschool.

In relation to the Ultranet we make the following points:

- any introduction must be properly supported and resourced
- parental access to information will be restricted to those families that have internet connection at home and parents who are proficient in its use.
- the Ultranet alone will not address improved communication between school and parents.

In particular this is an issue for low socio-economic parents. We advocate the introduction of Home School Liaison Officers to facilitate school-parent communication in certain communities.

Parents are important partners in learning and we support the development of new strategies to tackle the difficult problem of how to continue parental engagement in their child's schooling beyond the primary years. We also welcome the development of closer links between schools and early childhood services and schools becoming children's and community 'hubs'. There will be a need for strategic resources and proper consultation processes to effectively implement these initiatives. Teacher and principal workload must also be addressed as there is the potential for this to significantly increase if the additional resources are not provided. Proposals to support schools in enhancing the use of community resources, including business resources and the statewide LLENS, to open up post-compulsory options for students seem like good ideas. Our caveat would be that partnerships between businesses and public schools must involve strict guidelines about the limits of commercial sponsorship.

Early Childhood Development Discussion Paper

(Proposals which affect both schools and early childhood are commented on in the Schools Discussion Paper section)

The AEU agrees with the position set out in this Paper that having early childhood services as part of the same Department as school education, and the Commonwealth Government's commitment to early childhood as a national priority, provide an unprecedented opportunity to make a substantial improvement to preschool education and other early childhood services

Partnerships with Parents and Communities

As we have stated in our response to the Schools Paper, we believe that the vital role that parents play in a child's education should be assisted in every way through Departmental policies and resources. We also support parent involvement in decision-making. It is important however, that parents themselves should determine their level of participation rather than having particular obligations imposed upon them. Our concern in the early childhood sector is that parents are being required to act as managers, employers and fund-raisers in preschools rather than, and more importantly, as learning partners. This situation should be reversed through the Department taking over as the employer of teachers and assistants so that parental time and effort can be concentrated on their real interest - enhancing the learning development of their children. A balance needs to be established between maintaining and encouraging successful programs which are responsive to the needs of local communities and having a system-wide guarantee of quality through measures such as requiring fully-qualified early childhood teachers in each preschool and centre.

System Development and Reform

The AEU supports the Paper's focus on improving the quality and co-ordination of existing early childhood services, including local government and community-based programs and the development of improved linkages to schools. It is also important that there be fuller integration of education, care and health services.

The Paper proposes that 'one system' should underpin the 'developmental journey' from 0 to the end of schooling. The challenge for the Department is to turn this rhetoric into a reality. In the 0-8 stage for example, it should not be a 0-5 and a 5-8 structure cobbled together with under-resourced networks reliant on the individuals in each service or sector making it work through their own personal voluntary contribution of time and effort. A 'one system' approach will require appropriate levels of resourcing so that networks and other linkages can be effectively sustained. We would expect resourcing issues to be addressed in the final Blueprint document. Another significant step in implementing the one system approach would be the State Government becoming the employer of early childhood teachers, early childhood assistants providing preschool education programs and early childhood teachers providing early intervention.

The AEU is strongly opposed to any moves to privatise community-based preschool education or other community based early childhood services. This is of particular concern in the context of the coordination and integration agenda outlined in the Blueprint and the fact that 70% of long day care services in Victoria operate for-profit. Any new services, such as the 65 long day care centres from the Commonwealth Government allocation, should be delivered through the public/community-based sector. We believe that there should be a statement in the final Blueprint 2 document, similar to that in the Schools Discussion Paper, outlining the central importance of the public and community-based sector in the provision of preschool education and early childhood services.

The Paper refers to the further development of cluster management, however the Minister has not yet released the findings of the Review of Cluster Management. Experience has confirmed that cluster management does not deliver a system of service provision but rather a patchwork of very differing levels of service. We support the delivery of multiple services on school sites. The system must also retain the opportunity for parents to elect to utilise individual or combinations of these services. Integration should not compel families to utilise services they would not otherwise seek to access (such as access to a preschool program being dependent on enrolling in a long day care program).

The Paper fails to address the need for new and expanded facilities to meet the increase in demand resulting from: reduced group sizes associated with improved staff/child ratios, increased participation levels, the growth in three year-old pre-school programs and the implementation of the Commonwealth Government's 15 hours per week commitment. These demand pressures can only be met through adequate resourcing which can translate the rhetoric about new models of service delivery into quality delivered on the ground.

Workforce Reform

The AEU welcomes the Paper's commitment to improving levels of suitably qualified staff in early childhood services, including the goal of all centres employing a four year trained early childhood teacher. The research evidence is clear about the importance of fully qualified staff in the delivery of quality services. We agree that the qualification base for all new staff should be at least a post-secondary school early childhood qualification (such as the Certificate III in Children's Services). Any extension of this to existing staff will necessitate proper provision of support to enable them to undertake an appropriate course of study (time release, relief staff, fee support etc).

As well as ensuring that staff in early childhood services are appropriately qualified the other quality assurance measure which must be addressed is professional accreditation for qualified child care workers, certification for unqualified staff and formal registration through the Victorian Institute of Teachers for early childhood teachers.

An important consequence of the increase in the qualifications/skills of staff will be the need for linked salary increases and therefore increased government funding levels. Increased funding will be necessary to ensure that fees do not increase and negatively impact on the capacity for children to attend services.

The proposed reforms in early childhood education will substantially increase the demand for fully qualified early childhood teachers. This demand will come on top of existing staff shortages. Improvements which we firmly support such as improved staff/child ratios and the requirement for an early childhood degree-qualified teacher in all early childhood education and care settings will further increase demand. To help to meet the increased demand we support pathway courses that enable qualified child care workers to up-grade their qualifications to degree-qualified early childhood teachers. Appropriate levels of RPL should be granted (which is not always the case currently). However it is imperative in

responding to the increased demand that the integrity of the early childhood teacher qualification is protected through teacher registration. This process would also ensure that teacher education courses in the early childhood sector are subject to an equivalent accreditation process to that applying to other teacher qualifications through the Victorian Institute of Teaching (a body resourced and supported for this role).

The Paper acknowledges a skills shortage and a competitive employment market but does not adequately address the issues of attraction and retention. Government reliance on incentives and regulation is insufficient. Unless the issues of salaries and terms and conditions of employment are addressed, staff shortages will continue and worsen. For dual-qualified early childhood teachers working in preschools and early intervention programs, the competitive market is the schools sector. The Paper acknowledges the importance of salary parity for early childhood teachers at the graduate level as one of the government's key achievements, but fails to acknowledge the relevance of full salary parity at other levels of experience to the capacity to deliver much of the Blueprint's workforce agenda. Without addressing the ongoing issue of salary parity, graduates will continue to choose to work in the schools sector, experienced teachers will continue to leave the early childhood sector to work in schools and school leavers will choose to enrol in primary teacher courses rather than early childhood teacher courses.

The attraction and retention of early childhood teachers will be further jeopardised by any diminution in their terms and conditions of employment (in response to the Blueprint agenda of service delivery models). There are presently high levels of burn-out and turn-over amongst staff in long day care centres and this impacts on the quality of provision. Already early childhood teachers working in these centres often have lesser conditions (such as reduction of non-teaching time) as compared to teachers in preschools and this contributes to burn-out and turn-over, and is a contributor to the low numbers of early childhood teachers working in long day care settings. Reducing teacher conditions which contribute to quality education programs (such as allocations of non-teaching time and leave) will accelerate the movement of early childhood teachers into the schools sector.

Any response to the Commonwealth's commitment to 15 hours per week of preschool education which serves to increase the casualisation and under-employment of early childhood teachers, will be counter-productive. Government funding levels and policies need to be targeted to improving the attraction and retention of early childhood teachers through ensuring that they can have full-time employment and appropriate working conditions regardless of the setting in which the early childhood education program operates (preschool, long day care, early intervention). Government funding support is needed so that costs to parents do not increase. If parental costs do rise, the objective of both State and Commonwealth Governments, to increase participation in preschool education programs, will be undermined.