



**AEU**

**STATE BUDGET**

**SUBMISSION**

**2010-2011**



**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 the Government should consider not only in the context of the 2009–2010 budget but also in the policy development for the next term of government.

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

The Productivity Commission “Report on Government Services” 2009 was released on January 30.

The report which covers the 2006/2007 budget period confirms again that Victoria spent least per student/student hour in every category.

The combined recurrent Commonwealth and State/Territory government expenditure on government schools was:

- \$10,327 per FTE primary school student
- \$12,704 per FTE secondary school student

For VET, the national rate was \$13.03 per annual hour.

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>	<i>Aust</i>
Govt Primary	10 223	9 075	10 550	12 189	10 304	10 059	12 195	13 618	10 327
% less than national average	-1.01	-12.13	2.16	18.03	-0.23	-2.6	18.08	31.86	..
Govt Secondary	12 909	11 575	12 308	15 377	12 266	12 269	14 450	18 707	12 704
% less than national average	1.61	-8.89	-3.12	21.03	-3.45	-3.43	13.74	47.25	..
VET Institution (annual hour)	12.63	11.61	14.24	13.73	14.8	13.74	15.53	20.98	13.03
% less than national average	-3.09	-10.86	9.32	5.38	13.61	5.48	19.21	61.05	..

Table 1: Government recurrent expenditure on public education and percentage difference from the national average.

It can be seen that in 2006/2007 Victoria spent:

- \$1148 less per student than NSW and more than 12 per cent less than the national average for primary. Recurrent expenditure per student was 1 per cent less than the previous year in real terms. Nationally, expenditure grew by 2 per cent over the same period.
- \$1334 less per student than NSW and nearly 9 per cent less than the national average for secondary. Recurrent expenditure per student was 2 per cent less than the previous year in real terms. National expenditure remained essentially the same (-.02 per cent)
- \$1 less per annual hour in VET institutions than NSW and nearly 11 per cent less than the national average. It was the lowest level of expenditure over the last five years in real terms.

Consistent with the government's belief "that every Victorian child deserves the best possible start in life" (State government Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development), 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. The AEU is heartened by the policy of the Federal government to target additional funding to disadvantaged schools. We hope that the State Budget will build on this and provide further funding to address inequity in educational outcomes.

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.

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 and in this context we welcome the commitment within the Blueprint to the implementation of the Commonwealth and Victorian government commitment to early childhood centres on school sites. Further we welcome the commitment to collaborative partnerships between schools and other services where co-location is not feasible. The strengths and benefits that can be derived from an integrated system of education and care will be facilitated by this relationship. The Blueprint identifies a number of these however there are others which we contend should be pursued.

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.

### **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 again 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 by:

- Continuing to increase participation in preschool education
- Addressing the needs of the increasing number of students with behavioural and emotional issues
- Reducing class sizes
- 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
- Addressing the skills shortage and the need for lifelong learning and training.

### **The importance of universal preschool provision**

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 shared understanding of the critical nature of preschool education is evident through the State and Commonwealth governments' partnership approach to the early childhood education reform agenda. Seeing this agenda a reality presents many challenges which the Brumby government is approaching with vigour. Resolving these challenges will however require ongoing partnerships, not only with the Commonwealth, but with all of the stakeholders within the sector. The creation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has not only opened up opportunities that will benefit children, it has put in place mechanisms for the establishment and maintenance of relationships critical to achievement of the complex work ahead.

Implementation of the universal access policy, improved staff:child ratios for children 3 years and older through the National Quality Standards; and the introduction of regulatory requirements for a qualified teacher in all standard licensed early childhood services will place a greater strain on supply of qualified early childhood teachers. 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. However an effective workforce strategy needs also to be supported by reliable workforce data. Currently the lack of such data due to the employment structures within the sector hampers the department in many of its endeavours to implement policy effectively.



Endeavours to attract and retain early childhood teachers within the early childhood sector have been significantly improved with the development of two major industrial agreements [within the sector] underpinned by a common Heads of Agreement. These agreements will provide for salary parity for teachers at entry level and parity at the top of the scale in the life of the Agreements. The support of the Brumby government, through the provision of increased funding to enable this outcome, is acknowledged.

However endeavors to attract and retain highly qualified staff into the full range of service types and locations will fail whilst terms and conditions are lower in some services than others. Without the capacity to address the industrial exploitation of early childhood teachers in long day care settings, policies of integration of care and education service and universal access will struggle. It is evident by the dearth of teachers currently employed in long day care settings and the appalling conditions of those who do so fleetingly that the current reliance on market forces is not the answer.

Whilst recognising the intent of Government with the proposed Community Sector Portable Long Service Leave Fund, it is the AEU's view that the needs of the preschool sector and those of government across the sector will not be achieved. The fund will not facilitate the capacity for preschool staff to move across the various work locations (e.g. community managed service to local government service and vice versa, or community managed service to private long day care and vice versa). It will not acknowledge the fact that there has been a history of portability in the sector (based on previous legislation and goodwill). It will not adequately address the long unresolved portability of long service leave issue for preschool staff and as a result it will not act as a mechanism to support attraction and retention.

Despite the recognised and on-going endeavours of the Brumby government to address the issue of affordability and access, costs associated with early childhood education remain prohibitive for some parents and while the cost of four-year-old preschool education provision is shared between government and parents (currently a 65/35 per cent split) this is likely to continue.

Despite the rushed timeline, the development and implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework is welcomed by the AEU. The resources and training provided to the sector have been welcomed. However, to ensure that all staff within the sector can appropriately engage with the government, it needs to provide a more broadly available suite of training and resources.

Similarly the AEU endorses the endeavours of government to facilitate smooth transitions of children from early childhood programs into school. In order for this to become a sustainable aspect of the early childhood to school journey of children and their families, the AEU believes greater resources must be provided to facilitate time release for establishment and maintenance of local transition networks, common professional development, preparation of transition statements, reciprocal visits for educators, etc.

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 as a first step towards universal provision of preschool programs for 3 year olds.
- 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.
- As an interim measure to central employment of preschool staff, the government should establish as system of central payment of and associated record keeping for preschool staff.
- A system of portability of long service leave should be linked to the system of central payment of preschool staff.
- Recognition should be given to the professional status of preschool teachers with the ongoing support and facilitation of salary parity with primary school teachers in all settings delivering a preschool education program 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.
- Funding for professional development should be provided to support the ongoing implementation of the VEYLDF and transition to school policy.

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

In *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood*, the Victorian government recognised 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 acknowledged 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” and recognise the government’s commitment to roll out the Early Childhood Intervention Reform and the first phase of 1000 additional Early Childhood Intervention Service places.

Higher youth unemployment demands increased support for schools and TAFE:

- 16-19 year old unemployment is 19.3% in Victoria – the highest since 2005
- 16-19 year old participation rate is the lowest since 1993 (both figures from August 2009 Labour Force data ABS).

Dealing with disengaged students in the context of high youth unemployment and with a higher school leaving age will pose extra challenges for teachers and students in Victorian public secondary schools. The article below mentions that Australian teachers are already spending more time than their international colleagues maintaining class-room order. High youth unemployment, the Commonwealth’s ‘earn or learn’ Youth Allowance policy, and the proposed increase of the school leaving age in Victoria will all add to the number of disengaged students and

classroom disruptions. Extra resources, especially in middle and later years, will be required to cope with these pressures.

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/can-i-have-your-attention-20091009-gqkw.html>

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report February 4, 2009 concluded that government investment of \$1.19 billion in initiatives focused on the early years of primary education delivered improvements in student outcomes but these gains were not sustained as they progressed through school. This was more marked for numeracy. "There is a need to focus effort early, on the students that need support, and for that support to be closely monitored and sustained as they progress through school. This focus is needed for both low-socio-economic status (SES) schools and for low-achieving students in higher – SES schools." VAGO "Auditor-General's Report: Literacy and Numeracy Achievement In brief Wednesday 4 February 2009."

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 whilst the development of a whole of government strategy for children and young people aged 0-18 with a disability or developmental delay as articulated in the Blueprint is a valuable approach, there is no easy solution to this problem. 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 funded 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 and expansion of the Primary Welfare Program
- 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.

### **Closing the Achievement gap and sustained intervention**

The *National Report on Schooling* shows there is a widening gap in student performance as students progress through primary school. Educational authorities appear to have assimilated the myth that learning problems can be sorted out with short sharp intervention in year 1. The AEU believes that this widening gap is caused because resources are not available to sustain the intervention in the upper primary

classes. Therefore the AEU believes that resources should be provided to the upper primary school grades to sustain intervention programs and close the achievement gap.

While literacy has received significant investment since 1998 the same can not be said of numeracy. There should be a stronger focus on numeracy.

The AEU welcomes the plan to introduce Mathematic Specialists in Primary Schools for 2010. However, this initiative is limited to 12 months and only involves 40.5 teachers. The program needs to continue beyond this time and be expanded. We propose this should be increased by an additional 40.5 teachers.

In addition, investments should be made into numeracy intervention. This is supported by the findings and recommendations by the Victorian Auditor-General's Report in February 2009 (Recommendation 6.1 and 6.4.)

DEECD should adopt a stronger focus on numeracy by introducing an early intervention strategy for students struggling with numeracy and strengthening support for mathematics reading (Recommendation 6.1).

DEECD should improve targeting of and sustained support for students achieving well below the expected level in literacy and numeracy (Recommendation 6.4).

Literacy and numeracy support and intervention needs to go beyond the early years.

### **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 DEECD proposed restructure of the Koorie support workforce. The restructure has begun to address what had previously been an undervalued and casualised workforce. Access to improved salaries, professional learning and on-going employment goes a long way to addressing what had been lacking.

The system still needs to provide and support professional learning opportunities for principals and teachers (across all sectors) to increase their understanding of Indigenous culture, language and social inclusion.

Further initiatives need to be developed to increase the number of Koorie teachers.

### **Supporting our teachers and education support staff**

Teachers and education support staff 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. Building on *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* acknowledge the importance of building the professionalism and sustainable capacity of the early years workforce to underpin quality improvement in early years services. It identifies the

important aim to increase qualification levels among early childhood education and care staff and a major priority of attracting and retaining staff including encouraging high-performing entrants into early childhood services.

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 also in conjunction with primary teacher colleagues. With the introduction of the Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework and transition statements and plans it is imperative that provisions are made for networking opportunities to support the ongoing engagement of early years staff across the sectors.
- 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 number of places available through the professional leave program be expanded, with a capacity to undertake projects in line with individual school improvement plans, rather than being restricted to the current central DEECD priority
- The Rural Retraining Program be expanded to enable more special school teachers to gain their Special Education Qualifications.
- Additional support be provided to rural schools to enable them to participate effectively in professional development programs, currently difficult due to distance from major centres (travel, accommodation costs which city schools don't have to bear) and CRT replacement.

In addition to supporting teachers in specialist schools to gain their special education qualifications there should be expanded workforce initiatives that encourage teachers in mainstream schools to also gain special education qualification. The rural retraining program and scholarships need to continue to target places for special education.

ASDS (Autism Spectrum Disorder Students) are becoming more prevalent. It is essential to strengthen the ASD expertise for teachers and the education support workforce by providing targeted training for staff working with ASD students.

The current CRT budget allocation in the Student Resource Package is inadequate with the many schools using their allocated budgets by July. We propose that this be increased from the current 7.3 days per teacher to 14.6 days.

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’s introduction of 300 secondary teacher assistants in secondary schools has been welcomed and has been extremely effective in reducing the administrative burden on teachers and allows more time to focus on teaching and learning. Due to the success of this program the AEU calls for the program to be expanded and further positions to be created in both primary and secondary schools.

- Providing increased funding for ICT resources and training for early childhood teachers and assistants.

The new Children’s Service Centres Regulations 2009 introduce the requirement 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. We recognise the government is providing 200 scholarships in 2009/2010 worth \$1000 each. However we recommend the following additional 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.
- Funding for professional development for current unqualified staff covered by the grandparenting provisions of the Children’s Services Regulations 2009 to undertake the required professional development.

### **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. The AEU has welcomed the Victorian government’s commitment to rebuild or modernise every government school by 2015. The \$1.9b over the current parliamentary period has provided a solid start to this process.

The Federal government’s BER funding has provided additional stimulus and has seen strong investment in primary school infrastructure.

Accordingly, the AEU calls for a bringing forward of the rebuilding modernisation process by two years to 2013.

In the next two years we also urge a particular (but not exclusive) focus on secondary schools.

We also strongly recommend that where possible any rebuilding or modernisation be completed as one project with no staging. Staging building works leads to constant disruption to students’ education and badly affects the morale of staff.

The new modern learning environments require new teaching methods.

Accordingly, support and professional learning needs to be provided for teachers working in these new settings. Time needs to be provided to enable effective planning so that teachers to adapt the curriculum and develop teaching strategies best suited to flexible learning spaces.

**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. This is particularly important in those schools where new, open and flexible learning spaces have been built.
- 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.

The Government must do more to support students with challenging behaviours and ensure that schools are better able to deliver classroom environments that are conducive to the effective learning of all students. We recommend that the Government:

- Provide more professional development support to enable teachers to best deal with challenging behaviour as it arises in the classroom
- Increase support to schools to enable improved whole school approaches to student management. In this context, the recent requirement for schools to

develop new student engagement policies can only be effective when combined with enhanced resources to enable schools to support the learning and welfare needs of all students

- Significantly increase the provision of temporary alternative education settings that provide intensive support for disengaged students and those 'at risk' of becoming disengaged
- Establish additional alternative education settings/schools which provide a permanent alternative for those students who cannot be supported within mainstream schools.

The growing role of schools as a key community resource to deal with increasingly difficult and complex social problems requires increased funding by Government and a renewed desire to integrate schools with other social support services.

### **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 welcomed the significant funding increase in the 2008/09 State Budget for the VETIS program. Importantly, the new funding regime was structured to ensure that the tuition cost of students undertaking vocational learning is accommodated within the school's Student Resource Package.

With the funding arrangements only guaranteed until the end of 2009, there has been a shortfall in funding due to the dramatic and unexpected increases in VET enrolments. If the needs of all senior students are to be met, the funding model for the VETIS program must be reflective of these dramatically increasing student enrolments beyond predicted levels to enable all students to pursue vocational training as part of their post compulsory education. Moreover, the AEU believes that the Government must consider funding measures to help students and their families tackle the high cost of materials that must be purchased by students in order to successfully complete many VETIS courses in which they enrol.

### **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. Through 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. Whilst agreements have been put in place to provide staff with greater certainty in terms of their entitlements and employment protections as a result of mergers, schools still 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 but this is also equally

important in the following years as it takes time for new buildings to be completed and for new school cultures to be developed.

**Improved funding for secondary schools undergoing significant change**

Some secondary schools are experiencing a range of pressures that directly impact on their capacity to offer effective and relevant teaching and learning programs within the constraints of their existing Student Resource Package (SRP). In particular these difficulties impact on schools which have declining enrolments, an experienced staff profile (not funded at actual cost) and in communities with families from low socio-economic backgrounds. It is commonplace that such schools, in an attempt to address these concerns and improve outcomes for students in their care, are often involved in discussions with neighbouring schools regarding cooperative arrangements, mergers and/or *Building Futures* projects.

This is all being done within the Government's school improvement agenda.

These schools are actively changing their structures and practices to improve outcomes for their students. However, they are under considerable budgetary pressure when stretching their SRP to accommodate what are often significant and costly changes. They cannot reduce their curriculum and/or specialist programs, particularly at the senior level, for fear of furthering their enrolment decline. Nevertheless the limitations of their declining budgets often require such decisions be made. The reduction of post-compulsory curriculum and program choices impacts directly on the capacity for these schools to do all that is needed to provide students with the training pathway they need. This has the effect of further exacerbating the rates of students from our poorest socio-economic areas not completing Year 12 or an equivalent certification.

These issues are particular prevalent in country Victoria, where students already face significant disadvantage in relation to post school options as schools struggle to offer a breadth of curriculum with declining enrolments. The economic difficulties facing rural and regional communities due to drought, declining agricultural markets and decreasing populations are only serving to exacerbate the educational challenges facing students attending schools in these areas.

The AEU believes that there is a need to address these issues through greater equity funding which is targeted to a smaller percentage of schools which are most in need. Apart from resourcing issues, there needs to be an increased understanding of the challenges that face these school communities. This is paramount for any serious attempt to improve the training and future employment prospects of their students. Often school communities can feel unsupported when faced with strict accountability measures and 'one size fits all' budget arrangements.

Consideration also needs to be given to the provision of additional financial assistance to schools with shrinking budgets (due to enrolment decline) and significant work to do in terms of school improvement. The changes that are often required to improve student outcomes can only be achieved in a supportive and positive environment which encourages staff to change their practice and take risks to improve overall school performance. This is difficult, if not impossible, in an environment where staff believe any wrong move could result in budget deficits, reduced curriculum and program offerings and staffing excess processes.

It is not uncommon for schools facing the challenges outlined above to also be involved in developing co-operative relationships with like schools in their area. This has led to a growing number of school communities deciding to merge. Such mergers are frequently accompanied by *Building Futures* or BER proposals that seek improved teaching and learning facilities. Such decisions are not taken lightly and create a significant resource drain on the school communities involved. The administrative work alone to create a new entity is enormous, on top of the human resource issues in bringing two or more schools together with consequent staff and community concerns. Unfortunately, this is dealt with in an insufficient and ad hoc way across the state, with some regions providing limited support whilst in others it is left solely to the school principals and staff involved. These school communities are taking decisive steps to improve education provision and are actively engaged in the Government school improvement agenda.

The AEU is deeply concerned that the failure to provide these school communities with adequate additional financial support undermines any attempt to improve the opportunities and outcomes of the students in their care.

All new initiatives should be fully funded and not reliant almost exclusively on the “good will” of teachers to see their successful implementation. (P-2 English On-Line as an example.)

#### **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, as well as additional resources to enable staff to incorporate Ultranet functionality into the daily operation of the school and teaching and learning within the classroom
- Provide increased funding for ICT hardware and technical support for schools to ensure they are able to maintain fully operational networks to enable the smooth integration of the Ultranet.

#### **TAFE**

Victoria continues to be the most financially productive TAFE system in Australia. However we still lag behind Australia in funding. The Skills Reform Policy claims to be making more money available for vocational education and training, but the student contact hourly rate contributed by the government will reduce under this policy. This will see Victoria fall even further behind the national average funding model.

#### **Skills Reform Policy**

The AEU remains vehemently opposed to major aspects of the Skills Reform Policy, in particular:

- Increasing enrolment fees and the abolition of concession for Diploma and Advanced Diploma
- Increased hourly rates
- Introduction of an income contingent loan scheme to accommodate higher fees
- Making public money fully contestable and available to private providers
- Further increasing the number of private RTOs in the system
- Full implementation of a user choice model which moves funds from the public to the private sector.

Increasing fees for TAFE students will not address the cost of living expenses that unemployed and under-employed students face. Introduction of a HECs style loan system will only further burden our most financially disadvantaged with debt. TAFE students are debt averse and avoid going to university to avoid the associated debt. These fee hikes plus the loans scheme are a major barrier and disincentive to participation in TAFE.

The AEU wants a guarantee that the concession enrolment fee for Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses is re-instated.

### **Support for lifelong learning**

The Victorian government needs to:

- Lift Victorian student contact hourly funding to TAFE up to the national average within three years to provide more genuine places, more teachers and better facilities
- Improve the range of courses locally available which means increasing the regional funding allocation
- Improve pathways between schools and TAFE, and between TAFE and higher education
- Reduce casualisation of the TAFE teaching workforce
- Guarantee that no TAFE Institute will be worse off financially under the Skills Reform Policy.

The AEU wants the government to conduct a fully transparent process of the Review of the Skills Reform Policy and announce its recommendations by mid 2010. The AEU believes it has a role in determining the Review's terms of reference and also a role on the Review's Steering Committee, or overseeing body.

### **Professional Development**

The continuing failure of 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 a central body 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 AEU should be consulted when determining the professional development needs of the teaching workforce.

There continues to be major issues around the renewal of the TAFE teaching workforce particularly in the area of professional development and succession planning. The key plank to both these critical issues is the funding of approved TAFE teaching qualifications. It is one thing to attract teachers into the system but the



government must provide funding so that every TAFE teacher is fully teacher qualified and supported in achieving that qualification. Clearly the quality of provision in the system relies on qualifications, both at the industry and teaching level.

**Providing for adults with formal educational needs**

The chronic under funding of the Disability sector in relation to Day Services is well known to all involved in the sector. The AEU has been attempting to increase the annual salary adjustments above that of the DHS Funding model. A review by DHS on the current terms and conditions has failed to produce one piece of research or analysis after 12 months of dithering.

Therefore the AEU calls for an immediate independent research group to be commissioned for this task. This research should examine comparable wages and terms and conditions in other states and government agencies.

Furthermore the government and the AEU must jointly develop a new career structure which will attract retain and develop the Disability sector Day Services workforce.