

# ***EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE'S NEEDS***



*NEW DECADE  
NEW COMMITMENT  
NEW INVESTMENT*



## ***PUBLIC EDUCATION***

**P**ublic education is the cornerstone for our common future, prosperity and happiness. It is imperative that it should be of the highest quality, accessible and effective for all.

By public education we mean education which accepts all students — preschool, school, TAFE, and other adult learners — caters for all needs and serves all communities regardless of income, ethnicity, religion or gender.

It provides the foundation for a start in life: a community of friends and acquaintances; the skills, knowledge and discipline necessary for successful participation in the workforce; frames of reference for making sense of present and future demands; and a continuing interest in the fundamentals of learning — curiosity, investigation, rational analysis, considered conclusions, open and honest discussion. We share the experience of formal education as an induction to social behaviour and to the cohesion on which our society depends.

It is not just the wealthy few who should have access to the necessary ongoing opportunities that education provides, but every person. Every person should be provided an education that meets his or her individual needs.

We, as members of the AEU, will play our part. We want to make our system of public education the best it can possibly be. We want to continue to play our part in maintaining our vibrant, democratic, multicultural society. We want every person to have the opportunities they deserve.

***PUBLIC EDUCATION MUST BE AND REMAIN THE FIRST PRIORITY OF ANY VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT.***



## PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

This is the fourth in a series of vision statements published by the Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union.

The first, *Getting the Basics Right*, appeared at the end of seven years of Kennett government — seven dark years for public education in Victoria. It proposed an agenda for change based on four fundamental principles which we continue to adhere to.

- Education is the cornerstone of our common future. Everyone should have access to a high quality education.
- Education consists of a partnership between the Government, schools, preschools, TAFE, students and parents. Each of these groups has its own role to play and commitments to meet.
- Education is an investment in our future, and therefore should be the number one investment priority in Victoria.
- The Government has a primary responsibility to provide quality public education for all.

Much has changed for the better since that first publication. The Bracks/Brumby Government has acted on much of the detail in our last three vision statements. The AEU is proud of our role in that process, not as a source of external criticism but as a responsible partner in the process of reconstruction.

There is, however, a lot more to be done. This publication outlines the direction we must take to fulfil our agenda for *Education for Everyone's Needs: New Decade, New Commitment, New Investment*.

***PUBLIC EDUCATION WHICH IS STRONG, VIBRANT AND WELL-RESOURCED IS THE BEST INVESTMENT ANY COMMUNITY, AND ITS GOVERNMENT, CAN MAKE FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE.***



Mary Bluett  
AEU Victorian branch president



## ***OUR CHARTER***

### *THESE ARE THE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR THINKING.*

**F**ormal education is designed to equip people with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to experience success throughout their lives. It should also instil a desire and capacity to engage in life-long learning so people continue to grow and flourish as individuals.

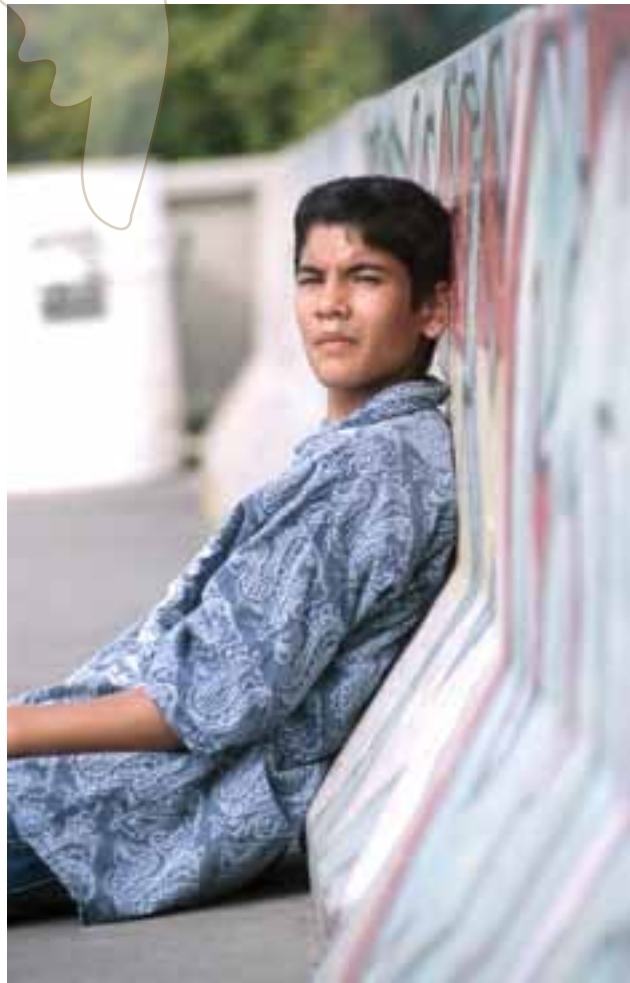
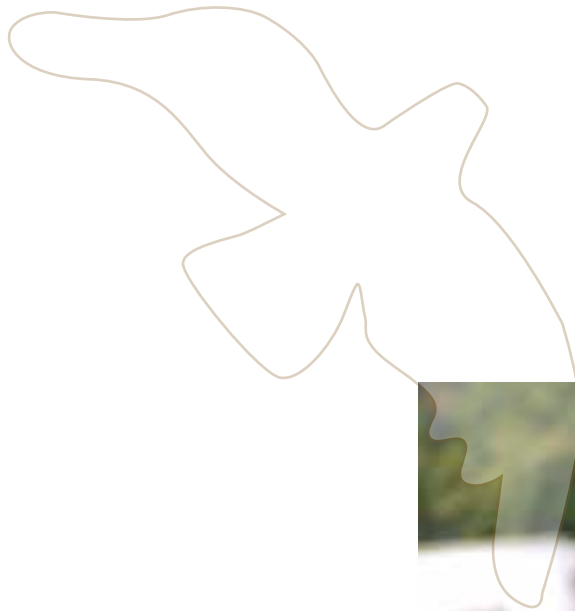
Education is a process that takes place over time and builds on previous learning. Public education must provide an integrated and effective series of learning experiences from the building blocks of preschool education through to the senior years of school and beyond which enable young people to develop the knowledge and skills to pursue a life and career pathway of their choice.

#### **ACCESS FOR ALL WILL BE ENHANCED BY**

- Guaranteeing universal access to preschool.
- Supporting all students, and addressing the needs of the increasing number of students with behavioural and emotional problems.

#### **STUDENT PERFORMANCE WILL BE IMPROVED BY**

- Continuing to focus on literacy and numeracy as part of a balanced curriculum throughout schooling.
- Identifying and addressing the needs of students not achieving benchmark/developmental standards throughout their experience of education.
- Uncrowding the curriculum and constructing curricular offerings, and timetables, that enable sustained deep learning and breadth of learning.
- Facilitating teaching in professional teams, and providing time and resources for teachers across sectors to work together developing effective approaches to learning and teaching drawing on their own knowledge and skills and those from elsewhere.
- Developing learning partnerships with parents, recognising their primary role as educators and supporters of formal education, learning and development.



**STUDENTS WILL BE KEPT MORE EFFECTIVELY ENGAGED BY**

- Providing access to pastoral care and welfare support for every student.
- Building stronger and better relationships between students and their teachers, increasing personal attention by reducing class sizes (a maximum of 20) and reducing the number of teachers students have contact with especially during the middle years.
- Connecting early childhood, school and post-school sectors more effectively to facilitate seamless transition.
- Engaging parents in issues like absenteeism, disruptive behaviour, and poor academic results. They must be an active part of the solution.

**THE TAILORING OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL OLDER ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS WILL BE STRENGTHENED BY**

- Ensuring that the content and arrangements of the VCE cater for all students not just those aiming for a university place.
- Developing co-operative relationships and more direct links between TAFE and Year 10-12 providers to increase opportunities and ensuring a range of vocational options for students.
- Taking steps to address the skills shortage and the urgent need to recognise the requirements for lifelong learning and training.

## YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

This is a sturdy and reliable sentiment which we apply to most transactions. Cheapness and enduring quality are not usually found together and rarely so in an area as important as education from early childhood to late adolescence and beyond. With this in mind it is instructive to look at the Victorian Government's investment in public education and training.

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
2003-04	11 196	10 051	10 272	11 369	10 985	10 605	12 970	15 510	10 809
2004-05	11 395	10 034	10 854	12 754	11 206	10 843	13 070	15 924	11 156
2005-06	11 201	10 282	10 963	12 493	11 336	11 323	13 392	16 191	11 177
2006-07	11 156	10 158	11 334	13 564	11 211	11 285	13 463	15 661	11 302
2007-08	11 227	10 395	11 337	14 795	11 340	11 273	15 087	16 089	11 546

**Table 1: State and territory government recurrent expenditure (including UCC) per FTE government school student** [Source: Productivity Commission (2009) *Report on Government Services*]

Victoria has the lowest expenditure of any Australian state/territory, \$1151 per student below the Australian average. This represents a miserly additional investment per capita over a five-year period of \$344, or \$68.80 per annum. This contrasts with other jurisdictions where increased investment has been more significant including WA \$3426, Qld \$1065 and TAS \$668 per student.

### LET'S LOOK AT IT ANOTHER WAY.

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
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	

**Table 2: Government recurrent expenditure on public education and percentage difference from the national average** [Source: Productivity Commission (2009) *Report on Government Services*]

Victoria spends \$1,148 per head per year less than NSW on its primary students — more than 10 per cent less. It spends eight per cent less per head than Tasmania. For secondary students, Victoria spends \$1,334 per head per year less than NSW.



PHOTO: MARK RUFF

### WHAT HAPPENS WITH PRESCHOOLS?

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Recurrent funding 2008-09 (\$'000)	142390	140684	38389	109325	97620	25557	20955	25583	600503
Enrolments	65581	62562	15886	29426	21630	5830	4113	3155	208183
Recurrent funding per student	2171.2	2248.7	2416.5	3715.3	4513.2	4383.7	5094.7	8108.8	2884.5
ERP (3-5yos in June 2009)	535.6	711.8	222.3	1292.6	1756.0	13670	1587.7	2444.6	733.5

**Table 3. State and territory government recurrent expenditure on preschool services, 2008-09 (\$'000)**

[Sources: 'Children's services – attachment', *Report on Government Services 2009*, various tables; 'Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, Cat. 3210, Tables 1 to 9, ABS, 2009]

Victoria spends \$636 less per preschool student than the national average and almost less than half as much per student than Tasmania.

### WHAT HAPPENS WITH TAFE?

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
VET Institution (annual student 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 4: Government recurrent expenditure on vocational education and training and percentage difference from the national average** [Source: Productivity Commission (2009) *Report on Government Services*]



PHOTO: MARK FARRELLY

The Victorian government spends 10.86 per cent lower than the Australian average on vocational education and training.

Do these figures suggest that there are reasons for complacency in considering Victorian education and training? The recent report from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office *Literacy and Numeracy Achievement* (Feb, 2009) makes five points. One concerns the importance of data about which the AEU needs no convincing. These are the other four.

### **1.3.1 Support for literacy**

Efforts to improve literacy achievement over the last 10 years have done little to improve the average achievement of students across the state.

### **1.3.2 Support for numeracy**

Low student achievement results for numeracy indicate that effective programs are needed to better support all teachers in further developing their numeracy teaching strategies. ...

### **1.3.3 Support to address social disadvantage**

The literacy and numeracy achievements of students from low-SES schools need to improve significantly to meet expected levels. Funding to address social inequity in literacy and numeracy achievement equates to around 3 per cent of the total schools' budget. This is very low in light of the large achievement deficit of students from low-SES schools. ...

### **1.3.4 Support for low-achieving students**

The audit results highlight the need to target the large numbers of students who are achieving well below the expected level, especially for numeracy.<sup>1</sup> ...

This document lists a series of other areas in which investment is urgently required to make Victorian education and training what it should be. Some of the key themes —

- » Increase funding across all sectors to at least the national average as a first step.
- » The equity component of the Student Resource Package must be increased.
- » Exciting things have happened in the early childhood sector but there is much still to be done to put it on a professional footing.
- » We need to do more for our vulnerable students, especially for late adolescents given the new pressures to stay on at school or enter training.

<sup>1</sup> Downloaded from [http://download.audit.vic.gov.au/files/Full\\_Report\\_Literacy\\_and\\_Numeracy\\_Achievements.pdf](http://download.audit.vic.gov.au/files/Full_Report_Literacy_and_Numeracy_Achievements.pdf)



- » Approaches to TAFE need rethinking in terms of the public interest.
- » We are experiencing teacher shortages now in many learning areas and in many parts of the state.
- » There is work to be done in thinking about how best to carry out the rebuilding program and to provide support for school amalgamation.
- » Finally, we believe there must be a new and concerted effort to shore up the substance and quality of public secondary education in this state.

The government has stated consistently that education is its number one priority. Our message to the Victorian Government:

PHOTO: MARK FARRELLY

**THE NEXT DECADE MUST BE ONE OF FURTHER INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION.**

- » INVEST IN ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY.
- » INVEST IN TEACHERS AND EDUCATION SUPPORT STAFF.
- » INVEST IN BUILDINGS AND RESOURCES.



PHOTO: NOEL BUTCHER



## ***INVEST IN ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY***

**T**he quality of a society can be determined by the way it treats its weakest members. No one is sure who said this first, but its truth has been confirmed countless times.

For years now concern for issues related to equity 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 of equity we need a public education system that has the resources and policies to provide education for everyone: people who are at the beginning of their lives, people who have passed the compulsory years of participation and people at the margins of society for other reasons.

The idea of education for everyone by itself is not enough. We need education for everyone's needs. The system needs to be dedicated to the educational needs and pastoral care of each and every student, ensuring that their needs are met and that their individual interests are engaged and extended, an education which equips them with the skills needed to participate meaningfully in both working and community life.

Equity and the redress of social disadvantage have long been a source of concern for the AEU. We are driven, as the government should be, by the view universally supported by research, that money spent on the education and general wellbeing of children when they are young saves vast amounts over time. It is essential that the government is long-sighted in this regard.

There are two measures which must be put in place immediately.

- » Increase the equity component of the Student Resource Package by five percentage points in each of the next five State budget periods to provide support for disadvantaged school students.
- » Extend the Primary Welfare program and provide additional resources for student welfare more generally.

## CONTINUE REBUILDING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

*A strong and clear impact on results was shown by preschool attendance rates and duration of preschool attendance. Those countries where more students attended preschool and did so for longer periods, achieved better results on the PISA tests at age 15. This result carries a clear message for policy makers on the importance of preschool education accessible to all.*

— Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2004)  
*Learning for Tomorrow's World*

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 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. 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. Now, let's make it work better.

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 and supported by assistants to all four year-olds.

However, implementation of the universal access policy, improved staff:child ratios for children aged three 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.

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, in addition to the inadequacies of the employment structures themselves, hampers the Department in many of its endeavours to implement policy effectively. As noted below it is crucial that the DEECD becomes the employer of teachers and assistants working in the early childhood sector.

Despite the recognised and ongoing 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.





The development and implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework is also welcomed by the AEU. However, to ensure that all staff within the sector can implement this Framework effectively, the government 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 the establishment and maintenance of local transition networks, common professional development, preparation of transition statements, reciprocal visits for educators.

- » 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 three year-olds.
- » Funded (free) access for children with additional needs and integration support services is also required urgently.
- » A long term plan to address the problems generated by 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 Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and transition to school policy.
- » The DEECD must become the employer of all early childhood teachers and assistants.
- » Recruitment and training of more teachers to meet demand and address areas of shortage.

### ***PROTECT AND SUPPORT VULNERABLE STUDENTS***

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. In *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood* (2007), the Victorian government cites research which provides strong evidence that early intervention and support can help families to remain intact and assist children with special needs to thrive. The social problems that are confronted by disadvantaged students are complex and while 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.



*Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood* 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', and we recognise the government's commitment to roll out the Early Childhood Intervention Reform and additional Early Childhood Intervention Service places. More can be done however.

- » **Funding to early intervention programs must be increased 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.**
- » **Preschools and schools must be better linked with community services to provide counselling and support for families under stress.**

But there are other issues which must be confronted in relation to the needs of vulnerable students.

There is clear evidence over a long period that the level of resources and funding required to ensure quality education for disabilities/special needs is inadequate with negative consequences for students, families, education workers and schools.

The Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities 2002 found what it called clear and unambiguous evidence of:

- An increasing proportion of students with an identified disability, a growing number of students with increasingly complex disabilities relative to the overall student population and a considerable level of unmet need.
- Under-funding and resourcing of programs, including capital costs of compliance with legislative changes associated with the *Disabilities Discrimination Act*, aimed at bringing students with disabilities into the mainstream of learning.
- A serious and worsening skills shortage among teachers who increasingly find students with disabilities assigned to their classes, with teachers not always well prepared for this experience and unskilled in methods which involve teaching across a wide spectrum of abilities, capabilities and disabilities and dealing with the classroom dynamics that are affected by the presence of students with different disabilities.
- An under-resourced assumption that with inclusion policies now broadly accepted, classroom teachers will develop skills in areas that were once the domain of specialists.

In Victoria, three programs or intervention streams — the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD), The Language Support Program (LSP), and funding to deaf facilities, hospital school and to students with complex medical needs — provide for students with disabilities.



The Office of School Education Strategic Plan for 2006-07 estimated that around 15 per cent (81,000) of Victorian government school students were students with additional needs; including students with intellectual, sensory or mobility impairment, language disorder, disturbed behaviour, emotional disorder, social and economic disadvantage and/or significant interruptions to school attendance.

A recent report by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using information provided by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development showed that for the 2007 calendar year around 17,300 students were funded through the PSD. This is around 3.25 per cent of the total Victorian government school population. Approx 56 per cent of these students were enrolled in mainstream primary and secondary schools and 44 per cent in special schools. PSD-funded students were enrolled in 1,418 out of 1,606 government schools (88 per cent) across Victoria.

DEECD data shows a recent trend of increasing enrolments in special schools. Prior to 2005, approx one-third of PSD-funded students were enrolled in special schools. The proportion is now approaching 45 per cent.

The AEU supports:

- » A review of the current funding for students with disabilities in both special settings and mainstream schools.
- » A review of facilities in special schools.
- » Improved professional development and support for teachers dealing with classroom dynamics that are affected by the presence of students with different disabilities.
- » The provision within the Facilities Schedule of a "baseroom" to provide for some special needs students including those with behavioural or family problems in mainstream schools.



PHOTO: MARK FARRELLY

## *SUSTAINING SUPPORT WHILE IT IS NEEDED WITH A NEW FOCUS ON NUMERACY*

The recent Victorian Auditor-General's Office Report 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 students progressed through school. This situation was more marked for numeracy.

Literacy and numeracy support and intervention needs to go beyond the early years. The most recent *National Report on Schooling* shows there is a widening gap in student performance as students progress through primary school. Yet education authorities appear to have assimilated the myth that learning problems can be sorted out with short sharp intervention in Years P-2. That degree of intervention, while worthwhile, is clearly by itself not enough. The AEU believes that this gap could be significantly reduced by maintaining intervention support in the upper primary classes. Therefore the AEU believes that

- Resources must be provided to the upper primary school grades and junior years of secondary schooling to sustain intervention programs and close the achievement gap.

Interventions related to the development of literacy skills in the early years have received significant investment for more than a decade now. The same cannot be said about numeracy. Numeracy and literacy skills have equal importance in contemporary society. Many gates are closed to students without numeracy skills and a background in mathematics, not just in terms of access to professional qualifications where that is certainly true, but also in fields as disparate as nursing and fashion design.

The AEU welcomes the plan to introduce Mathematics Specialists in Primary Schools for 2010. However, this initiative is limited to 12 months and involves just 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.

- That the Mathematics Specialist program must, subject to a review of effectiveness and possible remodelling, be continued beyond 12 months and that at least double the investment is required (in the short term 40.5 more teachers).
- Additional investments should be made into numeracy intervention. This is supported by the findings and recommendations<sup>2</sup> of the Victorian Auditor-General (February 2009) which should guide this work.

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<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 6.1. 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 6.4. DEECD should improve targeting of and sustained support for students achieving well below the expected level in literacy and numeracy.



### *A FAIR GO FOR EVERYONE*

Every student, and every teacher, deserves the right to be safe and to be in an environment which is free of disruption. We need to act firmly to eradicate bullying and other forms of damaging physical and verbal interference with students' well-being. However, in addition, we believe that it is essential that the government should restore the specialist settings for students with behavioural problems that were removed by the Kennett government. These settings provided an opportunity for an extended 'time out' in a constructive and caring environment and while not every student responded to this form of support, many students did. We also note the benefit to teachers and other students of a fixed-term absence allowing a more stress free and productive teaching and learning environment.

The AEU supports an integrated program to eradicate damaging and anti-social behaviour in our schools which includes the following.

- » Development of early warning systems for parents relating to absenteeism, disruptive behaviour, bullying or poor academic results so that parents can be part of the solution.
- » Increasing student welfare provision so every school has access to these resources.
- » Restoring and expanding the provision of special setting education community schools for students with learning and behavioural difficulties and for other students needing alternative education.
- » Pastoral care available for every student.
- » Support for parents who are not coping.

All of this requires a greater integration of Community Services and Education.



PHOTO: MARK RUFF

## KEEPING OLDER ADOLESCENTS PRODUCTIVELY ENGAGED

Youth unemployment figures in Victoria are the highest they have been since 2005 with the rate for 16-19 year-olds being 19.3 per cent. The participation rate in work, training or education is the lowest it has been since 1993 (ABS Labour Force data August, 2009).

It could be assumed that this would mean that the Victorian Government was investing in a range of employment-related programs tailored to the needs of upper secondary students. The last available figures suggest this is not the case.

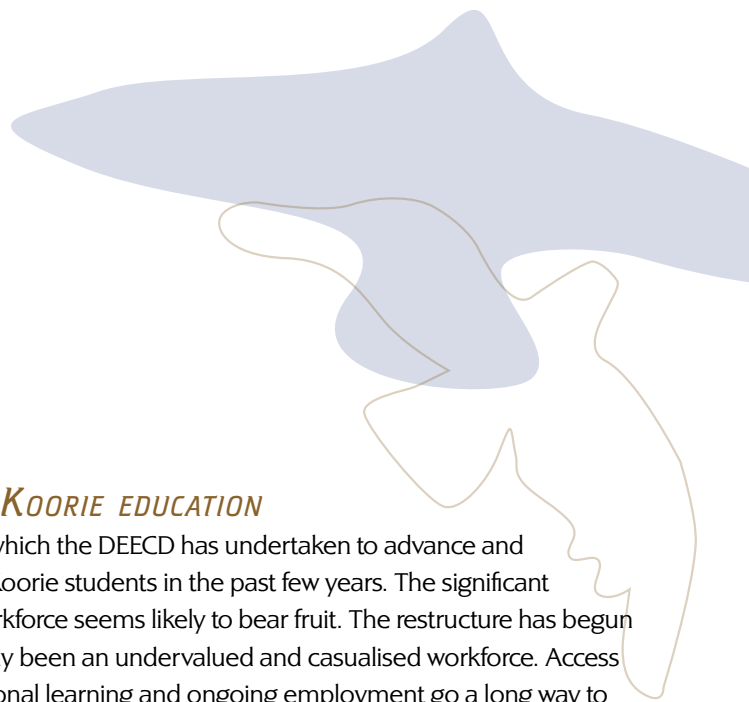
2007		NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
School-based apprentices and trainees	%	11	3.9	5.6	1.6	1.0	4.1	4.3	1.6	2.9
Other VET in schools students	%	34.9	21.9	42.5	28.7	21.0	53.2	43.8	39.2	30.6
Total	%	36.0	25.8	48.1	30.3	22.0	57.3	48.1	40.8	33.4

**Table 5: Proportion of school students undertaking a senior secondary school certificate who undertook VET in schools, 2007.**

Far from leading the response from this direction, Victoria is considerably behind the national average and a long way behind the leaders.

Dealing with disengaged students in the context of high youth unemployment and with a higher school leaving age creates extra challenges and responsibilities that will fall heavily on teachers in Victorian public secondary schools. High youth unemployment, the Commonwealth's 'earn or learn' Youth Allowance policy, and the increase of the school leaving age in Victoria seem likely to ensure the enrolment of a higher proportion of older students who are disengaged and alienated from formal schooling.

- » Develop and implement suitable programs for the productive and engaged participation of these students using the resources of agencies involved in the development, support and welfare of this group.
- » Develop VET in schools programs and resources to accommodate an enrolment in Victoria at least equivalent to the national average.
- » Provide the additional resources required to implement these measures successfully.
- » Facilitate cooperation between schools and TAFE.



### *GOING FORWARD WITH KOORIE EDUCATION*

The AEU applauds the work which the DEECD has undertaken to advance and strengthen the education of Koorie students in the past few years. The significant restructure of the support workforce seems likely to bear fruit. The restructure has begun to address what had previously been an undervalued and casualised workforce. Access to improved salaries, professional learning and ongoing employment go a long way to addressing what has been lacking.

That should not distract attention from the continuing educational disadvantage faced by Indigenous students and the challenge that still remains in closing the gap between their performance and that of non-Indigenous students.

Two related directions for this process can be drawn from the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). In defining the curriculum to be taught in Australian schools, this document says: 'Active and informed citizens ... understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (Goal two).

Teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and otherwise including perspectives from our Indigenous cultures in the curriculum has a chequered history in Australian schools. Inaccurate and out-of-date information, negative portrayals, stereotyping and significant over-simplification, and racist or otherwise offensive commentary gave rise to understandable anger among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who encountered this material. As a result some, perhaps many, teachers abandoned including such material in their courses, feeling incapable of dealing with it sensitively and successfully. In some States and Territories inclusion of such studies in various aspects of the curriculum is mandatory. In others it is strongly recommended through curriculum prescriptions, frameworks and guides. Victoria is the least developed jurisdiction in the country in this regard. Much work remains to be done here.

- » Review and where necessary revise the curriculum to ensure inclusion of material which encourages the fulfilment of this national goal for Victorian students: 'to understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.' Ensure that ACARA meets their goal on the development of the national curriculum.
- » Provide and support professional learning opportunities for principals, teachers and support staff (across all sectors) to increase their understanding of Indigenous culture, history and contemporary circumstances in order that they can teach about past and contemporary issues relating to Indigenous people sensitively, accurately and confidently.



PHOTO: THOM RIGNEY

- » Provide for Indigenous Studies as a mandated part of teacher training at University.
- » Support schools in establishing and sustaining Koorie language programs.

The first goal of the *Melbourne Declaration* provides advice about a crucial step in this process. 'Ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process, including to promote high expectations for the learning outcomes of Indigenous students.' Schools should accept responsibility for this process, but this undertaking has been signed by the Victorian Minister and she and her Department must contribute to this process by facilitating and supporting it.

- » Accelerate the process of developing partnerships between schools and the families and communities of Koorie students.
- » Develop initiatives to increase the number of Koorie teachers in Victorian schools.

# SECONDARY EDUCATION: A SPECIAL CASE

Students of all ages have their own unique needs and challenges when it comes to education. These differ according to the age and stage of the student. The very youngest are making the transition from home life to more structured programs together with other young people for the first time. Primary-aged students need to become capable readers and writers and begin to build an understanding of mathematics. They learn more about getting along with others and develop their social skills and confidence in dealing with children and adults alike — with all the rules and expectations that entails. Adult learners often know what they want and need when it comes to education and training. They have ideas about how they learn best which might not be the same as those of their teacher. There might be existing gaps in their skills and understanding which need to be resolved before they can move on. Managing their expectations can be a source of tension which needs to be handled reasonably and with sensitivity.

But few learners are more challenging than adolescents. The teenage years are a period of rapid but variable physical and intellectual growth and development. The onset of puberty, the increasing demands of school and homework and the need to push the boundaries of behaviour and authority all combine to make these years the most demanding of

parents and teachers. Neural researchers observe that during adolescence the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain that handles key functions including planning, reasoning, anticipating consequences, sustaining attention, and making decisions, is not fully developed.<sup>3</sup> This will not come as news to parents or teachers of adolescents. It is a period of testing out, of investigation, of wonderful dreams, sometimes great works coupled with brainless behaviour and risk. 'Adolescent' is often used as a term of disparagement.

At the beginning of secondary education comes the transition from big fish in a small pond to the reverse and the learning of new school processes and practices. For many, secondary schooling ends with the most competitive and life-forming experience education offers — the VCE and the comparison of their performance with their peers. Secondary education has special needs.

In Victorian government schools its needs are even more special.

## INCREASING MARKET SHARE

Since 1998 there has been an increase of just under 40,000 students in the Victorian secondary education sector; 30,000 of those students enrolled in a non-government school. The growth in government secondary education over the last decade has been about 4.5 per cent, that in the non-government sector 17.7 per cent and, disaggregating that figure further, more than 30 per cent in the independent sector. Figures from 2008 show 58.5 per cent of secondary students were enrolled in government schools.

This trend has not occurred in the primary years. Ten years ago government schools had 70 per cent of the enrolment. A decade later that figure is 68.5. The



3 See for example: Caskey, M. M., & Ruben, B. (2007). Under construction: The young adolescent brain. In S. B. Mertens, V. A. Anfara, Jr., & M. M. Caskey (Eds.), *The young adolescent and the middle school* (pp. 47–72). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.



PHOTOS: MARK FARRELLY

population of primary students is comparatively stable, but the increase of about 12,000 has been more or less equitably shared. It is the secondary years where the issue is manifest.

There are some obvious reasons for this trend. The clearest is the funding regime instituted by the Howard government which has made the gated communities of private schooling accessible to a far wider proportion of the community. This huge investment of public money has not been matched by the same sort of investment in public education. The modest efforts made to promote the many fine qualities of public secondary education have not matched the power of sceptical innuendo and rumour.

We need to know more about why parents have made these choices, and we need to construct and implement an action program to shift the trend. We must not allow our public secondary schools to be caught in the downward spiral of residualisation.

The AEU believes this will take an effort across a range of fronts, based on good evidence and sustained over a decade. We call for the following.

- » Conduct a thorough research project into parent choice of secondary school, exploring the reasons for those choices and recommending avenues for enhancing interest and confidence in public education. Develop a ten-year plan to action those recommendations and commence its enactment as soon as practicable.

In the meantime —

- » Accelerate the buildings and grounds development programs in secondary schools. This should include the provision within the Facilities Schedule of a “baseroom” to provide for some special needs students, including those with behavioural or family problems in

mainstream schools.

- » Increase the per capita student investment to at least the national average by 2012 and further significantly increase funding over the next four years.
- » Take steps to increase the range and quality of offerings in secondary schools and the quality of the infrastructure to provide those offerings.
- » Provide more teachers and reduce class sizes.
- » Expand arrangements for student welfare and pastoral support, including providing specialist settings and programs for students with behavioural problems.
- » As noted elsewhere in this document, expand the number of teaching assistants available to these schools.
- » Conduct a campaign to promote the value and success of public secondary education.
- » Set targets for the percentage of students in government secondary schools.

### *AND OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN ...*

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 projects.



PHOTOS: MARK FARRELLY

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 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 particularly 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.

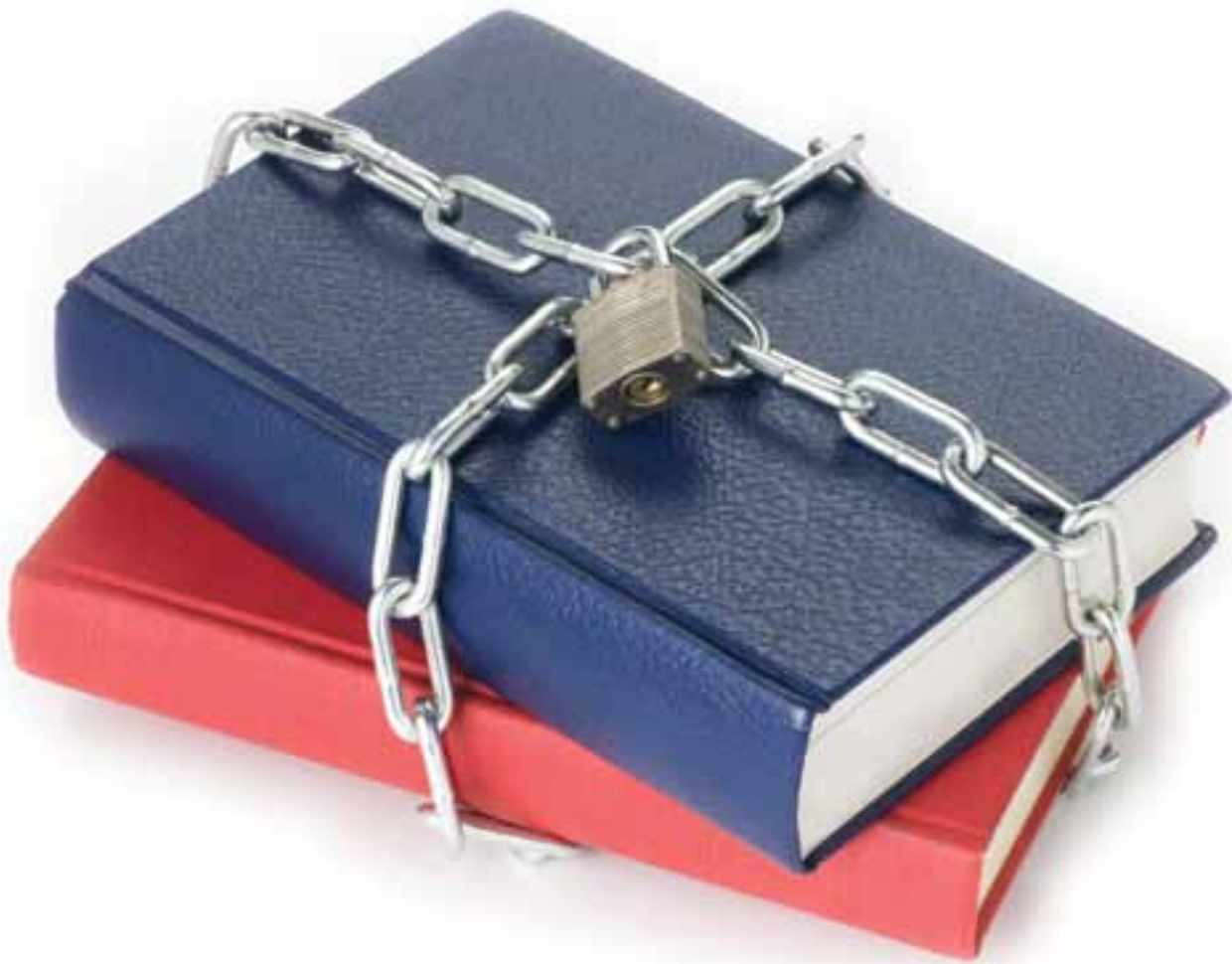
It is not uncommon for schools facing the challenges outlined above to also be involved in developing co-operative relationships with like schools in their area. This has led to a growing number of school communities deciding to merge. Such mergers are frequently accompanied by Building Futures or BER 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 staff to see their successful implementation.

» **Improve funding support for secondary schools undergoing significant change.**

The recommendations contained elsewhere in this document, in particular the Sections “A fair go for everyone” and “Keeping older adolescents productively engaged”, are central to delivering a quality secondary education.





### *IMPROVE, DON'T WORSEN, ACCESS TO TAFE COURSES*

*There is now a shortage of skilled workers across a range of industries and this constrains economic capacity, slows growth and restricts the ability of businesses to stay competitive. Skills shortages also limit industries' capacity to keep pace with the demand of operating in a global economy. Businesses continue to report that the lack of access to skilled workers is a significant barrier to their success.*


*— Allen Consulting Group (2006) World Class Skills for World Class Industries, Report to the Australian Industry Group, Sydney*

A high quality TAFE system is integral to maintaining and developing our collective skill base, and ensuring a training pathway for many of our young people. Increasing numbers of young people are turning to TAFE as their preferred post-school option, helping both to increase their prospects of employment and meet business and industry needs.

A well-resourced and supported TAFE system in Victoria can simultaneously:

- provide people with contemporary skills which build on existing strengths in such areas as agriculture, sustainability, food, the trades, manufacturing and tourism, and develop our emerging strengths in new knowledge-based industries such as information and communications, professional services and design.
- provide a second chance to people returning to the workforce and an opportunity to rejoin the pathway to lifelong learning.

Regardless of the current skills shortage in Australia and the need to maintain Victoria's productive capacity, the TAFE sector in this State is in urgent need of significant new financial support.



In 2004 the student contact hourly rate was \$12.58. In 2009, not only had it not increased it had actually declined by nearly eight per cent to \$11.61. In the same year the Australian average expenditure was \$13.03 with spending in Victoria coming a long last among Australia's states and territories.

The new 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 actually reduce further under this policy. This will see Victoria fall even further behind national average funding.

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 studies.
- Increased hourly enrolment 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 Registered Training Organisations in the system.
- Full implementation of a user choice model which moves funds from the public to the private sector.

None of these steps suggest the prospect of improvement of service or outcomes. 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 don't choose 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 all courses is re-instated. These are our concerns which should be resolved immediately or in the short term.

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

These seven steps are the basis for developing a first class TAFE system for Victoria.

- » Provide a fully-funded, government supported place in a TAFE Institute for any student enrolling in a Certificate or Diploma/Advanced Diploma program. A capped co-contribution might be considered where the student is not from a recognised category of social disadvantage or where the qualification is a second (or subsequent) qualification at Diploma level or higher and not in a skill shortage area or required for work/labour market mobility purposes.
- » Provide a fully-funded government supported place for any student in Foundation Studies programs (literacy, numeracy or pre-vocational programs) in a TAFE Institute.

PHOTO: MARK RUFF



- » Full-fee paying students places could be available for international students entering Australia under Commonwealth humanitarian or business critical skill shortage programs but not at the cost of unmet domestic demand.
- » Subject to a means test, provide income and accommodation support for students enrolled in a TAFE Institute.
- » Abolish 'contestability' for government funding for government supported places in TAFE Institutes.
- » Structure industry advisory bodies on the basis that 'industry' means more than 'business ownership' and includes workforce and public training provider representation.
- » Via greater legislative and/or regulatory control, ensure training is provided by an appropriately qualified and professionally registered workforce.



PHOTO: MARK RUFF

### *PROVIDING FOR ADULTS WITH FORMAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS*

While all people in society need to learn throughout their lives, there are some adults who have more specific needs for formal education to assist them to manage more effectively in society. Instructors and educators provide education and training services to people with disabilities in Adult Training and Support Services. This is difficult and demanding work which requires, for its success, a great deal of personalised attention. Relevant training for staff must be provided in dealing with challenging behaviours and the management of complex situations, not only for reasons of safety, but also to ensure that each trainee receives the level of attention that will enable them to learn effectively and become progressively more independent.

The chronic underfunding 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 Department of Human Services 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.

- » 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.
- » To fully fund any wage increase awarded by Fair Work Australia to our disability sectors.



PHOTO: MARK WILSON

## ***INVEST IN TEACHERS***

A school can be a school without a building; however a school can't be a school without a teacher — not a facilitator or an administrator or an agent or a mentor — a teacher. This fact will absorb about 80 per cent of education funding. They together with principals and support staff are the heart of the enterprise and must be treated as such. Supporting the quality of teachers' work is an ongoing concern but there are other matters which must be addressed as a matter of urgency if we are going to meet the baseline — suitably trained and qualified teachers in every class from early childhood through schools to TAFE.

- » **Ensure a qualified teacher for every class within preschool programs, schools and TAFE.**

And in all sectors, let's enable them to get on with their work. Remove routine administrative tasks and let 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.

Their value in terms of increasing productive contact with parents, monitoring attendance, reducing follow-up work with students outside the classroom, data entry, preparation of materials and other logistical tasks has been remarked on consistently by school personnel who have had access to this form of support. It has also been valued by parents. This initiative can be declared a success and should be significantly expanded and broadened.

- » **Expand the teacher assistant program and create further positions in both primary and secondary schools.**



## *RECOGNISE AND SUPPORT THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS*

It is long overdue that the professional status of preschool teachers was recognised and supported. The quality of preschool teachers is key to the best outcomes for young children. There are several measures in this regard which are required as matters of urgency.

- » Preschool teachers must be included in the Victorian Institute of Teachers. The new *Children's Service Centres Regulations 2009* introduce the requirement for all staff to have, as a minimum qualification for employment, 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 \$1,000 each. However we recommend the following additional initiatives:
  - » Funding to facilitate the availability of sufficient Certificate III courses and make them 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.

## *CONFRONT AND RESOLVE THE ISSUES OF TEACHER SUPPLY*

We have noted for some time that one of the major issues confronting education in Victoria is to ensure adequate supply in every sector — early childhood, schools and TAFE. We need to attract adequate, and increasing numbers of teachers; they must be properly qualified and professionally supported; and we must take steps to ensure they are retained in the service. This is presently a matter of great urgency which applies across the board in all sectors of education and training, with new concerns emerging for school education.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD**

In early childhood education, the shortage of qualified teachers remains serious, particularly in rural Victoria where part-time employment is the norm and the cost of relocation is a significant barrier.

The age demographic of preschool teachers is a significant issue with a high and increasing proportion within reach of retirement age. The problem of retention of experienced teachers will continue to escalate. In addition, increases in the birth rates



PHOTOS: MARK FARRELLY

and new federal and state government policies will further exacerbate the shortage of teachers. Attraction rates of new entrants to early childhood education is still well short of the number required.

The government acknowledges in Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce Strategy that "Victoria will require a substantially larger ECEC workforce by the time the new regulations come into effect in 2014. Demand will be particularly high for early childhood teachers". Of particular note in the context of universal access is the fact that "more than 60 per cent of Victoria's long day care centres do not offer a kindergarten program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher. This represents 660 existing services that will need to employ an early childhood teacher by 2014 to meet regulatory requirements." The government also acknowledges that "it can be harder to attract early childhood teachers to work in long day care."

The value of actions by government to ensure access for Victorian children to preschool (188 per cent increase in funding since 1999, including regulation and provision of \$10m to enable long day care to offer kindergarten) will be lost if services are unable to attract and retain teachers.

The key problems at the heart of both attraction and retention issues in this sector are inappropriate employment structures, excessive workloads, inadequate administrative support coupled with a high level of responsibility and lack of access to high quality professional development and professional support. These are matters which must be resolved.

### SCHOOLS

Since 1998 the number of teachers employed in the government sector in Victoria rose from 33,763 to 38,914 in 2008. Primary teacher numbers in particular have increased and we have seen the development of teacher scholarships and a more energetic graduate recruitment program. Despite this the most recent DEECD *Teacher Supply and Demand Report* (2008, and including figures from that year) contains disturbing news.

This *Report* indicates that in 2008 more than 10 per cent of primary schools and 56 per cent of primary/secondary schools and 60 per cent of secondary schools reported difficult to fill vacancies. It might be noted that 'difficult to fill vacancies' are defined in the report as 'no suitable, qualified applicants were provided through the graduate recruitment program, Teacher Scholarship Scheme, Career Change Program or Recruitment Online' meaning we will have to think again about what might work. The supply situation is becoming acute for secondary schools in certain hard-to-staff subject areas and geographical areas. This is a matter of considerable significance to the effective functioning of schools.



This report projects that this situation is likely to worsen over the next few years and that there will be a need to recruit a substantial number of teachers above and beyond graduate teacher supply. The shortfall now and for the next few years in the secondary area is of the order of 470 teachers per annum.

As noted this problem falls disproportionately across differing locations in the state, problems being particularly acute for schools in lower SES areas and those more remote geographically, further compounding other challenges faced by those who work in these schools.

There are also issues with particular learning areas. Languages Other Than English (LOTE) lead the list of subjects which 'schools can no longer provide due to lack of suitably qualified teachers'. One way to manage a shortfall is by declaring the area no longer exists. But this is hardly in line with the intention, for example, of the *National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program* — 'to significantly increase the number of Australian students becoming proficient at learning the languages and understanding the cultures of our Asian neighbours— China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea.'

But the highest number of notified difficult to fill vacancies in government secondary schools are not in LOTE. They are in areas where the issue cannot be easily masked: Mathematics, Science, and Technology. It might be noted that the percentage of teachers aged 50 and over in the government service is highest in these curriculum areas: Metal Technology, Electronics, Wood Technology, Clothing and Textiles, Technical Studies (general), Home Economics, LOTE (French), Accounting, Food Technology and Catering, and Senior Mathematics.

- » As a matter of urgency, review recruitment and retention strategies for secondary teachers in areas of demand.
- » Fund scholarships in learning areas where supply is not meeting demand. Maths-Science scholarships to end in 2010 need to continue and be expanded.
- » To help resolve the crisis in rural schools, consideration should be given to a campaign to encourage senior secondary students in rural schools to choose teaching as a career with a view to returning to the country. Scholarships and other forms of assistance should be provided as incentives to make this a reality.

The following two measures go to the heart of the matter and should be put in place immediately.

The best and most obvious way to attract more teachers is to increase the level of their salaries and the quality of their working conditions. Steps should be taken to ensure that these are the best of any in the country before this becomes a matter of crisis.

- » Provide the best salary and conditions in Australian education institutions.



PHOTO: GREG NOAKES

Offering fixed-term contracts appears to compound these problems. Nothing is more discouraging for new entrants into the profession to have to work for years on 6-12 month contracts with no job security.

The proportion of teachers in the government service on fixed-term contracts is now at its highest level since 1999. When the last of these statements was published the AEU was expressing concern about the level of 18.5 per cent in March 2005. At the end of 2008 it was 19.4 per cent having increased gradually but consistently since 2004.

Another way to attract staff is to offer long-term ongoing employment. One in five of all teachers working in Victorian government schools has fixed-term employment. While acknowledging there must be some room for flexibility, ways of making teaching in government schools and other education institutions more attractive take priority. We propose that a limit of five per cent of the workforce at any given time should be on short term contracts and no more than ten per cent in any given school.

- » Increase full-time ongoing employment opportunities. Limit the proportion of the workforce on short term contracts at any given time to five per cent and in any given school to no more than ten per cent.
- » Recruitment activities, including the graduate recruitment scheme should provide ongoing employment.

#### TAFE

The problem of casualisation is still a major problem with many Institutes insisting that 50 - 60 per cent of their teaching staff are to be casually employed even though the work such people do is of a continuing and recurrently government-funded nature. This is indicative of the funding problems associated with the function of this sector which can only be resolved by increasing expenditure.

- » Reduce casual employment by setting targets through Institute Performance Agreements.

#### *ENSURING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL CURRENCY AND GROWTH*

Research indicates that one of the most effective ways to ensure educational improvement is to have teachers, in all sectors, consistently developing their skills and knowledge both generally and to support current initiatives.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

Part of the process of professionalising the work of early childhood teachers and acknowledging the value, significance and expertise involved in their work is providing adequately for their professional development. The history of this area suggested that it was an unnecessary luxury. Budgets and time allocations made no allowance for this process. This must no longer be the case.

The government must recognise the implications of its own actions in this matter and accept the entailing responsibilities. With the introduction of the Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework and transition statements and plans it is imperative that provisions are made for ongoing networking opportunities to support the continued engagement of all early years staff across the sectors.

- » Funding and time release provision be made for enhanced professional development opportunities for preschool teachers and early childhood assistants, delivered both separately and in conjunction with primary teacher colleagues.
- » Provide increased funding for ICT resources and training for early childhood teachers and assistants.

## SCHOOLS

The AEU is not convinced of the effectiveness of current provisions made for schools' professional development activities. The increasing centralisation of the process has made it less directly useful to schools. There is an urgent need to re-establish the idea and practice of schools using professional learning to explore and resolve their local issues. That includes having enough time and resources to do so.

- » Provide a minimum of three additional pupil-free days per annum for schools to engage in professional development related to their own standing issues.
- » Provide additional CRT release for professional development.
- » Provide enhanced professional development, including mentoring, to support principals and assistant principals in their leadership roles.
- » Expand the number of places available through the professional leave program. Include the capacity to undertake projects in line with individual school improvement plans, rather than being restricted to the current central DEECD priority.
- » Introduce a professional leave program for secondary VET and VCAL teachers to enable improved and consistent contact with relevant businesses and industry.
- » Provide additional professional development for new government initiatives. The introduction of the Ultranet and National Curriculum are two examples.

There are two groups of teachers who have particular problems in participating in professional development activities: casual relief teachers and teachers in rural areas. It is just as important for casual relief teachers to be up-to-date with the professional knowledge as it is for other teachers. At present there is little provision or encouragement for them to participate in learning activities. Staff who work in rural schools have to deal with travel and accommodation costs which teachers in city schools do not have to bear. The frequent difficulty of teacher replacement also acts as a disincentive to participation. The government should recognise this and act to provide support.

- » Provide enhanced professional development opportunities for all teachers including casual relief teachers.
- » Provide additional support to rural schools to enable staff to participate effectively in professional development programs.

PHOTO: MARK FARRELLY



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 a special education qualification. The rural retraining program and scholarships need to continue to target places for special education.

- » Expand the Rural Retraining Program to enable more teachers to gain their Special Education Qualifications.

The range and incidence of student medical needs is increasing. We note that students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder are becoming more prevalent, and that cases of anaphylaxis and acute asthma attacks are occurring with a higher degree of frequency. It is essential to strengthen the capacity of teachers and the education support workforce to provide effective support for these students and the specialists who work with them.

- » Introduce targeted training and support for staff working with students who have medical conditions and minor disabilities which allow school attendance but which require monitoring and effective response.

Education Support staff also have significant professional development needs. It is important that school budgets provide increased funding for Education Support staff access to professional development and training.



PHOTO: MARK RUFF

## TAFE

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 must be consulted and included when determining the professional development needs of the teaching workforce.

Clearly the quality of provision in the system relies on qualifications, both at the industry and teaching level. 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.

- » The currency of TAFE teachers' industry and professional knowledge and experience must be maintained. Expand the Release to Industry Program for TAFE teachers.
- » Shift funding and responsibility for the professional development of TAFE teachers to the TAFE Development Centre including delivery of TAFE teaching qualifications.



PHOTO: MARK FARRELLY

### *REBUILDING OUR SCHOOLS*

In the AEU's last vision statement, we made a plea for the modernisation and upgrade of Victorian government school buildings.

*We confront a situation [we said] where a great deal of school building stock was constructed to meet the rapid expansion of the school population in the late 1960s and 1970s. It was constructed cheaply and was intended to last no longer than 20 years. We can see this prediction come true in the state of many of our school buildings. Poorly designed on the Dutch gable or 'chicken coop' standard model, these light timber construction buildings are poorly insulated, hot in summer and cold in winter, transmit noise readily, are functionally inflexible and wastefully expensive to maintain. The government must develop a bold plan to ensure their total replacement beginning immediately. This plan must be implemented over the next ten years so that Victorian Government school students are educated in 21st Century facilities. There must also be a commitment to get rid of portable class rooms that are now being used as permanent buildings.*

We noted that there were many examples in this and other countries where the replacement of building stock with excellent new buildings and the provision of new teaching and learning resources has had a positive effect on attendance, on care of the building and on the quality of education which occurs there.

The government took note and acted.



The AEU welcomes the progress made with the Victorian government's commitment to rebuild or modernise every government school by 2015. The impact of this \$1.9b investment is beginning to become visible in the way we believe it must.

The Federal government's Building the Education Revolution funding has provided additional stimulus and has seen strong investment in primary school infrastructure. The National Coordinator's Implementation Report indicates that there are 1,584 projects worth in the order of \$2.6 billion occurring in Victorian government schools.

- » Accordingly, the AEU calls for a bringing forward of the completion 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 (see elsewhere in this document) and major regeneration projects.
- » Additional funds must be committed to building maintenance so that the run-down which has occurred in the past is not repeated.
- » All rebuilt and modernised buildings should be environmentally sustainable.

### *PLACING SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE OF COMMUNITY LIFE*

In the same vision statement mentioned above we called for a rethink about the planning process. We saw it as an opportunity to aid the regeneration and transformation of our public school system. We have a chance to develop contemporary facilities for science and technology, for the arts and the performing arts, for middle schooling, for the use of information and communication technologies — everything in fact that a contemporary school needs to provide for contemporary learning needs.

Education precincts can be embedded in larger community projects to provide easy access to cross agency services and to locate education across sectors and training facilities together to enable easy collaboration by the institutions and teachers, to generate efficiencies of scale and usage of facilities, and to encourage seamless participation by students and their families. Education and training resources should be community facilities, encouraging school-community interaction and partnerships, building a sense of belonging, strengthening community identity and encouraging more widespread local advocacy for government education and training provision.

This approach must be continued. Through the nature of the physical infrastructure provided, we want to support schools and preschools as a primary local meeting place for parents interested in the future of their children in a society where increasingly we have less time to meet as a community and help each other. We need to rebuild public schools so community, sporting, cultural and educational facilities are located at or near the school. A model public school of the 21st century will have a preschool, primary school and secondary school co-located on one site with community sports ovals, swimming pool, gymnasium, theatre and library. It should also be co-located with other



community resources like maternal health, childcare, and community services. It should also have the agencies, pastoral care, welfare support and special settings required by students with learning difficulties or special personal needs.

- » New building programs should be tailored to the needs of the community in which they are based and designed to support the fabric and interaction of that community along with the functionality of shared resources and proximate location of services.

### **MANAGING THE CHANGES**

Not all results can be foreseen. We have learned some lessons from the rebuilding process. These range from the simple to the more complex. A simple example is that staged processes extended over several years cause constant disruptions which can and should be compressed. They affect students' education, the morale of staff and confidence of the community.

- » Where possible any rebuilding or modernisation should be completed as one project with no staging.

The new learning environments require new teaching methods. Accordingly, support and professional learning needs to be provided for teachers and Education Support staff working in these new settings. Time needs to be provided to enable effective planning so that teachers can work together to develop and implement effectively teaching strategies best suited to flexible learning spaces.

- » Provide support and assistance for teachers and Education Support staff adapting to new learning environments.

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.

- » Provide extensive and ongoing 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.
- » Develop guidelines for the operation of the Ultranet which protect all parties — teachers, parents, and students — from excessive demands on time and attention.



Another complex issue is that of school amalgamation. 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. While 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.

- » Provide improved and appropriate support for staff and schools both when mergers occur and subsequently.



## ***WHY IS PUBLIC EDUCATION ESSENTIAL?***

### *BECAUSE IT*

- Is vital to the future economic, social, cultural and intellectual development of our nation and all its citizens.
- Is for everyone.
- Provides everyone with the opportunity to shape their own future.
- Enriches and strengthens our local communities.
- Is the basis of an informed, active, fair and democratic society.
- Draws people together, and creates greater tolerance and appreciation of differences.
- Values our shared experience and our common good.

## ***WHAT SORT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION DO WE WANT?***

### *ONE WHICH*

- Is free and secular.
- Provides the best possible education for everyone's needs.
- Includes and values everyone irrespective of difference in race, religion, class, ability, gender, age or geographic location.
- Bridges the gap in advantage and provides students of all ages with a fair share of resources.
- Is fully funded by state and commonwealth governments at a level which reflects the value we place on every child and young person in our society.
- Is available locally and relates to the life of local communities.
- Provides for life-long learning and for second chance learning.
- Promotes tolerance and inclusiveness.
- Recognises inherited values while instilling a desire for new solutions.
- Has teachers and education workers who are well trained, well paid, respected and secure in their employment.
- Is given priority as an essential responsibility of governments.
- Will be here for future generations.