

IEUA
Independent Education union of Australia

**Submission to the Senate Select Committee on
School Funding Investment**

March 2016

Introduction

1. The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on School Funding Investment.
2. The IEUA is the federally registered union that represents workers, including teachers, principals, and school support staff, in Catholic, other faith-based and community independent schools across all the states and territories of Australia. While the majority of members of the IEUA are teachers, the membership of the IEUA also consists of workers engaged as teacher aides, administrative staff, gardeners, cleaners and caterers.
3. Membership of the IEUA is also diverse in respect to the types of workplaces included in its coverage. These range from very large schools with significant resources to extremely small rural schools with very limited resources. The variety of schools represents great diversity. . These include a wide variety of faith based and non-denominational schools, including, Catholic schools, Independent schools, Islamic schools, Anglican schools, Jewish schools, Steiner schools, Lutheran schools, Montessori schools, and privately run post-secondary providers. The union currently has a membership of over 75,000.

School Reform Agenda

4. The IEUA supports in principle education ministers' focus on continual improvement in school education including the provision of an equitable and excellent education for Australian students.
5. Further, the IEUA supported in principle the recommendations of the Review of School Funding (December 2011) including recommendations in relation to both school funding and delivering a quality education framework for all Australian students.

School Funding

6. The IEUA welcomed the commitment to a base recurrent grant per student and welcomed the 'bi-partisan' commitment of Australian political parties in the lead up to the 2014 federal election and in particular the 'certainty' of the funding model beyond the recent quadrennial approach.
7. The IEUA supports the principle of a funding model in which loadings are based on school size and location, and extra money is provided for socio-economic status, Aboriginality, English language proficiency and students with a disability.
8. However, the IEUA is disappointed that the school funding 'settlement' has once again become a contestable political football in the lead up to the next election as a consequence of the Australian Government's decisions, both budgetary and in Ministerial statements, to unpick the current arrangements and both weaken the capacity of the current arrangements to address identified needs and undermine funding certainty for schools, their students and the staff employed.

Underpinning Premises

9. Schools are not currently 'overfunded'. Evidence from both OECD reports and the Review of School Funding unequivocally illustrate this point.
10. Resources to meet the clearly demonstrable needs of disadvantaged learners in schools can only be begun to be met by re-commit to the substantial additional resources identified in the Review of School Funding report, including needs of Students with Disabilities, efforts to Close the Gap in relation to Indigenous Students and needs of students in rural and remote schools.
11. Indexation of school funding to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or a version thereof will significantly undermine any capacity for the schooling sector to

seriously advance work in relation to attracting, supporting and retaining highly skilled, professional teachers and staff. Such an approach will place even further downward, negative pressure on teacher and staff wages and conditions.

12. Schools and school systems require, and deserve, certainty of school funding. Ad hoc, hastily conceived funding arrangements and changes do not allow for appropriate planning of quality education provision. The current funding arrangements require evolutionary development built on certainty.

Funding levels

13. The OECD Education at A Glance 2014 report provides comparative data on government expenditure on educational institutions. As the Australian Government is most keen to observe relative student performance scores internationally, it presumably also monitors and would seek to improve relative expenditure.
14. The 2014 Report clearly illustrates that Australia continues to spend a lower percentage of GDP on education than the OECD average. This scenario has been observable in 2008 and 2000 data as well.
15. Australia only moves above OECD average expenditure when private sources of income are taken into account, in particular fees.
16. The 2014 Report indicates that Australian public expenditure on primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education represents 3.5% of GDP compared to the OECD average 3.6%. This is significantly less than our New Zealand neighbours who expend 4.8% of GDP.
17. Recent commentary about the 'large percentage increases in recurrent funding in school education' mask the fundamental reality that Australian governments' public expenditure was even lower relative to OECD averages

over the last decade and the recent increases merely reflect a movement towards the average rather than any overly generous provision.

Student Needs

18. School education research and governmental reports continue to illustrate significant unmet needs in school education and the consequent costs to individual learners and society as a whole.
19. The recent OECD Report into Low Performing Students concluded that helping disadvantaged students was essential for society and the economy.
20. OECD Director for Education and Skills, Andreas Schleicher said that: “The social and economic gains from tackling low performance dwarf any conceivable cost of improvement”.
21. The Review of School Funding Report clearly illustrated the collected evidence of the unmet needs in classrooms across Australia and its recommended model took an approach to recognize and fund the demonstrated disadvantage gaps through targeted and calculated loadings.
22. Further the Report and subsequent funding model adopted, and supported by all parties ahead of the last election, identified the need for significant ‘additionality’ expenditure in 2018 and 2019 along with clearly identified indexation arrangements, with both elements being part of the considered and agreed financial strategy to equip schools with capacity to provide the necessary resources for disadvantaged and under-performing students.
23. Recent submissions by many parties, including representative organisations and school parents to the recent parliamentary inquiry into Students with Disability funding arrangements, unequivocally demonstrates the continuing and massive unmet need for these students, their families and their schools

in ensuring that every one of these children has access to the highest quality education possible. These needs remain unmet.

24. The most recent Closing the Gap Report, presented by the Australian Government, once again illustrates that while there has been some progress, targets such as school attendance rates are lagging and will need significant acceleration in delivery, and consequently there is significant work yet to be undertaken only illustrating the need for better resourcing for indigenous students in schools across Australia.

Funding Indexation

25. The current school funding model provided certainty of funding not only beyond the historic a quadrennial approach but also free of the retrospective supplementation arrangements that sometimes dogged the previous funding arrangements.
26. The model's agreed indexation arrangements, supported by all parties prior to the last election, allowed for planning of resource allocation, planning for learning support and workforce planning.
27. Historic costs over the last decade, and indeed several decades, illustrate that the costs in delivering school education services compared to the general cost of living increases have consistently been greater, as evidenced by ABS longitudinal data.
28. Increases costs in education have reflected significant changes in delivery of education, increased requirements on schools; not only in educational and curriculum requirements but unfortunately major increases in red-tape, accountability, testing and reporting. Invariably these have arisen as a consequence of decisions of education ministers and requirements placed on schools and school systems externally.
29. These changes have invariably manifested themselves as additional workloads on teachers and staff in schools on top of and in addition to their

primary role and sometimes at the cost or expense of the teaching and learning program.

30. ABS data (6302.0 Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, November 2015) soberly illustrates that wages in the education sector have grown by 45% over the last ten years (18% in last 5 years) compared to the national average of 48% (18% over 5 years).
31. At a time when there is much political discourse by education ministers, usually without engagement or dialogue with the profession or its Union, around the issues of attracting and retaining the very best teachers into schools, any arbitrary or ill-formed price index imposed on school funding arrangements will only have a deleterious impact on the wages and conditions of school staff and significantly undermine any activity that purports to enhance the status of the school education profession.

Conclusion

32. Significant elements of the Review of School Funding recommendations will not be delivered or resources made available to address undisputed learning needs if current Federal Ministerial and Federal budgetary positions remain as policy for school funding beyond 2017.
33. To deliver the resources to meet the identified learning needs in the Review of School Funding report and the critical operational needs of schools, it is paramount that certainty of additional funding resources beyond 2017 be confirmed and delivered, as committed to by all parties prior to the 2014 federal election.
34. Review and adjustment of the loadings formulations, review of the underpinning loadings' data and in particular its robustness, and the relative weighting of base and loadings requires evolutionary attention not a new funding model or significantly lessened indexation arrangements.

Chris Watt
Federal Secretary
Independent Education Union of Australia
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