



IEUA
Independent Education union of Australia

**Submission to House Standing Committee on
Education and Employment**

Australian Education Bill 2012
15 February 2013



Introduction

1. The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into the Australian Education Bill 2012.
2. The IEUA is the federally registered union that represents workers, including teachers, principals, and school support staff, in Catholic and non-government 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, Steiner schools, Lutheran schools, Montessori schools, and privately run post-secondary providers. The union currently has a membership of over 71,200.

Improving the performance of schools and school students

4. The IEUA supports in principle the Australian Government's focus on continual improvement in school education including the provision of an equitable and excellent education for Australian students.
5. While recognising the need to set aspirational goals, the education of every child to their full potential as expressed in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians should be the focus of the Australian education system as data-limited international rankings are an inappropriate expression of the focus of school education.

Developing a national plan

6. The IEUA supports the framework of the legislation, including a continuous drive for school improvement, the improvement of school performance and educational outcomes for school students, and the provision of opportunities for engagement with Asia.

Reform directions for the national plan

7. Safeguards must be in place to ensure an emphasis on accountability is not at the expense of quality teaching and learning, particularly in relation to the analysis and application of data concerning educational outcomes of school students.
8. The IEUA believes the erosion of quality teaching and learning practices are a possible result an accountability system imposed on schools and educators if such a system focuses on a rankings-driven, punitive approach rather than a system that affirms quality teaching, supports teachers' professional development and encourages and sustains collegial engagement.
9. Greater accountability will require significant resources to ensure high teaching standards including time for meetings with colleagues, the analysis and application of data to improve student learning, and information sharing of evidence-based, best practice pedagogy.
10. The IEUA supports the principle that parents should have access to timely, meaningful information about their children's progress and are entitled to comprehensive and accessible reports about their child. Further work is required on the refinement of the National Assessment Program to ensure teachers and parents have information that is timely, valid and useful.

Developing benchmarks and supporting improvement

11. The IEUA believes that the benchmarking agenda must take into account quality assessment and reporting practices.
12. The IEUA believes that assessment and reporting policies and practices must be developed by education authorities in collaboration with the teaching profession to ensure that such practices are valid, reliable, fair, equitable, and motivate students to further develop their learning.
13. The current environment in which assessment and reporting changes are occurring is characterised by: policy settings that link compliance with assessment and reporting arrangements to funding; increased focus on reporting on school performance and school improvement data; and misuse of data by the media.
14. The development and implementation of future benchmarking and related practices must respect and involve the expertise of teachers and have their support and full confidence.
15. The IEUA remains concerned about mass standardised testing of student achievement such as through basic skills tests. The IEUA notes that international and national research shows such practices lead to a lowering of the quality of education and narrowing of the curriculum.

School funding

16. The IEUA welcomes the commitment to a base recurrent grant per student. However, significant additional funding is essential in each non-government school to meet the legislation's aspirational agenda.

17. The IEUA supports the proposed 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.
18. The IEUA notes that at the time of the closing date for submissions with respect to the Bill, there is not a working model of the proposed financial assistance to be provided to schools, government or non-government, that would allow any party to unilaterally endorse the introduction of a new funding regime with the underpinning foundations outlined in the Bill. A workable, tested and agreed model, with all parties, is essential before the aspirations of the Bill could be enacted.

Conclusion

19. The IEUA fully supports the structure, and the visions set out within the bill, but notes that the Australian Government has to provide significantly more concrete details including funding arrangements and specific measures for genuine reform.
20. The IEUA believes the Bill should have been delayed until details had been discussed, negotiated and agreed with relevant parties and a consensus had been reached as to how goals set out in the Bill were to be achieved.

Chris Watt
Federal Secretary
Independent Education Union of Australia
8 February 2013