

Submission
to
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Education and Vocational Training

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Inquiry into Teacher Education

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SUMMARY

The Australian Federation of University Women Inc (AFUW) is a federated association of graduate women formed in 1922. One of its main purposes is the promotion of education, especially for women and girls, as well as for disadvantaged and minority groups.

While it believes that all the questions raised in the Terms of Reference are of importance, it wishes in this instance to make a submission only to part (vi) – and to some extent part (v) of Section 7. This submission is based on research conducted over a period of several years into ensuring that primary and secondary teachers are equipped to teach adequately following the pre-service training given by the State and Territory Departments of Education and the Faculties of Education at all our universities, namely:

- (a) to deliver educational programs suited to the needs of Indigenous and non-indigenous students;
- (b) to give all students an understanding of the past history and the present circumstances of Indigenous Australians.

AFUW recognises that the Australian, State and Territory Governments have for some time attempted to develop policies addressing the manifestly unsatisfactory educational experiences and outcomes of Indigenous students (e.g. the 1975 Report of the Aboriginal Consultative Group to the Schools Commission; the 1989 Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy; the 2000 Department, Education, Science and Training (DEST) National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. It is only in the classroom however and through the work of properly trained teachers that any such policies can be realised, and we do not believe that this has as yet been achieved.

Recommendations:

That all Education Faculties should accept as policy the following recommendations (recently made to the Victorian Institute of Teaching), namely

That all pre-service programs ensure that all teacher graduates have participated in a range of educational experiences that have:

- been developed in conjunction with local Indigenous communities and/or Indigenous peak bodies
- raised the awareness of historical, cultural, socio-economic and educational issues concerning Australia's Indigenous peoples
- focused on appropriate pedagogy and curriculum for Indigenous students;

That, as soon as is feasible, an audit be conducted by the accrediting body in each State to establish that the policy is being put into practice in every institution responsible for teacher training;

That more effort be made to encourage Indigenous people to take up teaching as a career: e.g. by reserving places for Indigenous students in schemes such as the DEST scholarships to encourage males to train as primary school teachers.

1 Background to the Indigenous Education Project of the Australian Federation of University Women

In 1998 the AFUW conducted a two-day national Conference with the theme *Indigenous Education and the Social Capital: Influences on the Performance of Indigenous Tertiary Students*. This Conference was funded in part by a grant from the then Department Employment Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). Its proceedings were published by the Federation in collaboration with the Indigenous Research Centre of Curtin University, the First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research at Flinders University and the Aboriginal Research Unit of the University of South Australia.

The aim of the Conference was to provide an opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to speak out about and build strategies to meet the unique needs that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have within the University sector and facilitate a better understanding of Aboriginal perspectives in education.

It became clear however during the Conference that more information was needed as to what was being done to meet the needs of Indigenous students at secondary school level. AFUW therefore undertook to obtain consolidated information in the area of secondary schooling about the extent to which effect had been given to the recommendations of the 1975 Report to the Schools Commission of the Aboriginal Consultative Group.

Our enquiry focused on three particular recommendations of that Report:

- the introduction and maintenance of bilingual education programs
- the inclusion of Indigenous Studies in the curriculum
- the training of teachers

It is the third issue that we address in this submission. Recommendations 22 and 23 of the Report emphasized the need for all teacher trainees in Australia to study courses relating to Aboriginal social organization, tradition and contemporary culture, and that where possible trainee teachers should be able to gain experience in teaching Aboriginal children.

The Report also asked the Commission 'to convene meetings with teacher training authorities in Australia to negotiate with them about the basis on which they would be prepared to be involved in such a program and to discuss with them methods of involving Aborigines in the conduct of courses, and in reviewing course content.'

2 The Research Project

Stage One: Stage One of the project consisted of collating information from the Australian, State and Territory Departments of Education as to the nature

of their policies on Indigenous Education, especially with regard to the curriculum, to bilingual education, and their support for Indigenous students. A Report on this, prepared by a member of the AFUW Standing Committee on Education was submitted in 2003 to the AFUW Council, which endorsed the Report and agreed to proceed with Stage Two, which dealt more directly with the training of teachers.

Stage Two: AFUW was aware of reports indicating that, by 2000, there were still few who had any experience of Indigenous studies in their pre-service courses and only a limited group have had professional development in this area. The large-scale study of Australian teachers carried out by DETYA and the Australian College of Education in 1999 found that only 13.7% reported having had ‘training’ in indigenous studies. 3.7% reported that they had undertaken ‘training’ in pre-service, 8.1% through in-service and 1.9% in both. The equivalent Victorian figures (from a smaller sample) were 2.0% in pre-service, 3.1% through in-service and 0.4% in both – a total of 5.5%. (DETYA, *Teachers in Australian Schools*, 2000). In an attempt to update this information, the then President of AFUW wrote in May 2003, to thirty-two Deans of Faculties/Heads of Schools of Education in Australian universities. The letter requested information as to

- whether there are specific programs for training Indigenous students to become teacher-aides and teachers;
- whether, and in what ways, teacher education programs prepare *all* teachers to work with Indigenous students in pre-tertiary situations;
- the degree to which the maintenance of Indigenous languages and bilingual education programs are supported.

The response rate was less than 50%, which was extremely disappointing. AFUW believes that in matters of public interest, universities should be prepared to provide this type of information to the public. In an attempt to obtain this information, the then President again wrote in January 2004 an article in the newsletter of the Council of Deans of Education.

The project editor proceeded, nonetheless with the responses to hand and material available from other sources to compile an interim report, which was submitted to the AFUW Council in October 2004. This Report accompanies this submission as a separate pdf file. We would stress however that it is an interim report and has not been formally presented to the Australian Government. Due to the poor response rate, an Action Plan was devised by the AFUW Council to try to obtain more information. Each State and Territory Association in AFUW undertook to approach the Vice-Chancellor as well as the Dean of non-respondent institutions in their particular State or Territory. A sample of such a second-attempt letter is attached as Appendix A.

This strategy produced a number of responses, especially from New South Wales. It is disappointing however, that the institutions that would be regarded as the most prestigious of the east coast universities saw no need to respond—that is, the Universities of Queensland, Sydney and Melbourne and Monash University. Information was gained on the latter two however when contact was made with a group of members from the Faculties of Education of seven Victorian universities. They were concerned with developing an Indigenous education policy to be used by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which is the

teacher accreditation organisation in Victoria. The Convener of the AFUW Education Committee (and the President of AFUW-Victoria) was able to participate in these discussions and they resulted in the recommendations that we have endorsed as the first of our recommendations in this submission.

AFUW believes that, if put into practice, these recommendations would produce teachers able to create a more welcoming and motivating environment for Indigenous students. Further, the whole student body would be better informed.

We submit however that the commitment of Education Faculties to this crucial element of teacher training needs to be monitored, and recommend an audit to ensure that policy is being put into practice.

We also submit that the presence of fully-trained Indigenous teachers in the classroom would be a powerfully positive influence on the performance of Indigenous students. The financial capacity of Indigenous students to undertake tertiary education is very limited. It is essential that any targeted funding schemes to encourage people to enter teacher training should have reserved places for Indigenous participants.

Signed on behalf of the Australian Federation of University Women:

Rosemary A Everett.
President, AFUW Inc.

13 April 2005

Appendix A: Specimen of Second Request for Information

Professor Field Rickards
 Dean of the Faculty of Education
 The University of Melbourne
 Parkville Vic

27 October 2004

Dear Professor Rickards

The Australian Federation of University Women, through its Standing Committee on Education, has spent some time over the past five years compiling information on State and Territories' support for Indigenous students at secondary schools. A partial Report was completed in 2003, but it was not possible to complete all proposed aspects because information requested in May 2003 from thirty-two Faculties and Schools of Education had, in a number of cases, not been forthcoming. The University of Melbourne was among those who did not respond. We do understand that there are many demands on academic time, but we believe that these are important issues, and we would be extremely grateful if you, or an appropriate person in the Faculty, could provide information on the policy and practice of your Faculty with respect to three particular issues:

- whether there are specific programs for training Indigenous students to become teacher-aides and teachers;
- whether, and in what ways, teacher education programs prepare *all* teachers to work with Indigenous students in pre-tertiary situations;
- the degree to which the maintenance of Indigenous languages and bilingual education programs are supported

To provide some background to this request, I would point out that the 2003 Report represented research undertaken as one of the outcomes of the AFUW Indigenous Education Conference held, with DETYA support, in 1998. Unhappily, the Report shows that there has been too little progress in issues identified not only by the AFUW Conference in 1998, but also by the Australian Council of Deans in its 2001 *New Learning: A Charter for Australian Education*. When that document appeared AFUW wholeheartedly endorsed the following passage

Indigenous education in Australia is characterised by serious shortcomings – measured both in terms of educational outcomes, as well as in terms of social indicators of well being of young people in Indigenous communities. Instead of honouring diversity and community, in recent years we have seen measures such as the abolition of bilingual education in Indigenous Schools in the Northern Territory. Not only does this involve the denial of quite fundamental human rights – the right to be educated in your own language when it is the language of the land of your birth, it also involves a return to old racist and assimilationist assumptions that mainstream English-only education is best in terms of students' futures. Finally the path to reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settlers in Australia is a thorough understanding of Indigenous cultures and the history of

interaction with settlers. Aboriginal Studies should be a core aspect of all learning in Australia.

It is true that progress has been made in introducing Aboriginal Studies into the curriculum, but the training of Indigenous Australians to take their place in the classroom as teachers is proceeding very slowly. Moreover, while it is highly desirable that Indigenous students have the opportunity to be taught by Indigenous teachers, the responsibility for meeting the educational and social needs of Indigenous students rests, and will continue to rest, with the teaching profession as a whole. It is imperative that knowledge of, and above all respect for, Indigenous culture be inculcated in all teachers, not only those responsible for Aboriginal Studies as an isolated curriculum item. The DEST website information on Indigenous Education indicates, however, that only about half of Australian universities include Indigenous Studies as a core component in their teacher training courses.

It is essential for improvement in educational outcomes for Indigenous students that every teacher in Australia, whether in secondary or primary education, and whether in urban, rural or remote circumstances, is able to meet the needs of Indigenous students across a range of educational situations. AFUW believes that the responsibility for ensuring that this is the case rests with the Faculties and Schools of Education that are responsible for teacher training. We would be very grateful for any information you can provide as to how your Faculty/School is meeting this challenge.

AFUW understands that good programs of teacher education require adequate and stable funding resources. We will continue to approach both Federal and State governments to urge that adequate funding is provided and maintained for programs related to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, but our lobbying needs to be fully informed to be effective,

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Jennifer Strauss
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