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Girls, Schools . . . . and Boys
Promoting Gender Equity Through Schools:
Twenty Years of Gender Equity Policy Development

Research Paper
No. 24 1995–96
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Promoting Gender Equity Through Schools:
Twenty Years of Gender Equity Policy
Development

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Major Issues

Public interest in the subject of boys' education has been stimulated recently by various mass media reports of boys' supposed educational disadvantage. In 1994 the NSW Government instigated an inquiry resulting in a report, popularly known as the O'Doherty Report, that appeared to validate concerns about boys' educational performance. An interesting policy debate has emerged around the question of the extent to which concern about boys ought to be incorporated into policy initiatives which have, hitherto, been devoted almost exclusively towards improving educational outcomes for girls.

From the early 1930s until the mid-1970s, boys were more likely than girls to participate in post-compulsory education. This was especially noticeable in the tertiary sector, where in 1971 less than a third of students were female. Australia's workplace was also highly occupationally sex-segregated; a 1977 OECD report described it as the most highly segregated by sex of any it had studied. Prompted by concern about girls' educational participation and apparent relationships between school subject choices and career prospects, educators, bureaucrats and politicians in the early 1970s began to argue the need for improving the quality of girls' education.

In 1984, the Commonwealth Schools Commission recommended the development of a national policy on the education of girls. In that year a Working Party established by the Commission noted that girls continued to be disadvantaged by an education system that limited their options in and out of school. The Working Party argued that existing education systems produced and reproduced undesirable, gender-based divisions in society. Among other things it recommended the development of a national policy on the education of girls.

The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools was adopted in 1986, and thereafter government and non-government educational sector schools have been committed to implementing initiatives designed for the achievement of four Policy objectives: (1) raising awareness about the educational needs of girls, (2) providing equal access to and participation in an 'appropriate education', (3) creating a supportive school environment, and (4) ensuring equitable resource allocation.

Over the period 1988-91 a series of Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) reports summarised Commonwealth and State/Territory government sector and non-government sector initiatives in relation to each of the four National Policy objectives. Details from annual Girls in Schools reports suggest initiatives undertaken during the first five years of Policy implementation have resulted in modest levels of achievement and
minimal change. *National Schooling Reports* (released each year since 1989 and which report on a range of schooling matters in all States/Territories) reflect steady improvements in girls' rates of educational participation over the period 1989-92. However, subject choice selection remains strongly gendered at secondary and tertiary educational levels and the Australian workforce remains highly occupationally segregated by gender.

A review of the National Policy conducted in 1991-92 provided an opportunity to address problems recognised and articulated by academics, bureaucrats and teachers. The National Policy had been criticised for not taking sufficient account of some factors influencing educational outcomes, for offering naive and simplistic prescriptions for change, and for neglecting to address boys' education. Conceptual limitations were reflected in and compounded by weak national implementation and monitoring systems.

Taking into account the review of the National Policy, a new *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97* was endorsed by the Australian Education Council in September 1992. The eight priorities identified in the *National Action Plan* are: examining the construction of gender; eliminating sex-based harassment; improving the educational outcome of girls who benefit least from schooling; addressing the needs of girls at risk; reforming the curriculum; improving teaching practice; broadening vocational education and changing school organisation and management practice.

A recent feature of the debate has been a focus on whether or not boys are in fact being catered for in the schooling context. For example, in 1994 the NSW Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs set up an advisory committee (The Gender Equity Taskforce) to investigate boys education in NSW, and to make recommendations on the future focus of gender equity policies in that State. The resultant O'Doherty Report outlined the 'nature of the problem' and recommended the development of an inclusive gender equity strategy. The recommendation of an inclusive strategy was generally welcomed but some participants in the debate, such as the federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner (Ms Sue Walpole), were keen to point out the ongoing obstacles which faced girls/women, for example that:

- Australia continues to have one of the most gender segregated workforces in the industrialised world
- women are seriously underrepresented in management positions, and
- women continue to earn less than men.

Any attempt to evaluate the impact of the various strands of the National Policy for Girls is difficult but on the evidence reviewed in this paper it would appear that, at best, success to date could be described as modest. Improvements in the educational outcomes of girls began in the 1960s before the advent of the National Policy but it could be argued that Policy-related initiatives have helped facilitate, support and promote these improvements. In some quarters there has been awareness-raising about the educational needs of girls (and latterly, boys) and constructive attention has been paid to reform of the school curriculum and practices, including resource allocation, staff recruitment and development. But overall,
progress has been uneven and some have observed that activity has been most concentrated in areas most removed from practical application, for example, in bureaucratic and academic establishments.

The authors of the *Girls, Schools and Society* report in 1975 noted with concern that girls were less likely than boys to remain in school beyond compulsory age, or to be engaged in post-school education of any kind. While this is no longer the case some of the patterns observed in *Girls, Schools and Society* twenty years ago remain largely unchanged: subject choices are still strongly 'gendered', and Australia's labour force remains highly segregated by sex with women over-represented in lower status occupations, and earning, on average, less than men.

Critics of the National Policy have argued that it has relied too much on sex as a determining and unifying factor, and too little on other vital factors, such as race and poverty. Conceptual naivete may have resulted in practical failure because what was on offer was not sufficiently meaningful, relevant, or helpful where it mattered, at the 'chalkface'.

The implementation of National Policy initiatives was also hindered by the practical difficulties of coordinating and monitoring policy across government and non-government educational sectors in the nine jurisdictions that Australian federalism presents. Jurisdictions exercised great latitude in determining their activities within a loosely defined framework and synthesising and analysing vast amounts of essentially qualitative information, which without the benefit of agreed minimal data sets or performance indicators would have been a difficult task. As a result it is possible that actual levels of achievement as well as certain kinds of achievement were under-reported.

It appears that measures are now being taken within the context of the new *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls* 1993-97 and the accompanying Gender Equity Taskforce to address some of problems identified with the earlier National Policy initiatives. Priorities are now more thoughtfully targeted and less gender-specific; inattention to boys' needs has begun to be corrected and the development of a truly inclusive gender equity strategy is being contemplated. Reporting requirements are more realistic, and system-level performance indicators have been identified. It is important to acknowledge, however, that there are limits to just what can be achieved through strategies such as the *National Action Plan*. It is obvious that there are limits as to the amount of social change that can or should be effected through schools and educational systems.
Introduction

In the past few years, there have been numerous reports of girls outperforming boys in schools, outnumbering boys in tertiary institutions, and outperforming them in these establishments too. In 1994 the NSW Government instigated an inquiry into the subject, and in 1995 its Education Department announced the intention to hire 400 extra literacy teachers, in part to help deal with boys' poor literacy skills. 'Boys are in big trouble', warned the cover story of a 1995 edition of the Bulletin, which cited a Monash University publication questioning whether women should continue to be regarded as a 'disadvantaged' group. Evidence of a healthy level of public interest in this subject suggests the desirability of a review of gender equity policy developments.

The first section of this paper traces policy developments from 1975, when the landmark study Girls, Schools, and Society was published, to 1986, when the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools was adopted.

Part two synthesises information on the National Policy implementation and review from 1987 to 1992. Information relating to implementation is organised around National Policy objectives and based on government data gleaned from annual Girls in Schools reports and National Reports on Schooling in Australia. Review information is based on Commonwealth reports as well as the results of commissioned review consultancies. The work of several key academic experts on gender equity policy is integrated throughout to provide additional critical perspective, and insight into some recurring, problematic themes.

Part three canvasses recent developments, presenting information about the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97, and elaborating on the debate about boys' education. This latter discussion is conducted principally in the context of the findings of the O'Doherty Report and references made to it at a conference on gender equity held in Canberra in 1995.

The last section of the paper proffers an evaluation of impacts and outcomes of National Policy initiatives. Impacts are assessed in terms of attainment of objectives, and outcomes with reference to evidence of long-term change. Conceptual limitations and implementation weaknesses are proposed as reasons for short-comings. The paper concludes on a hopeful note, but arguing for more modest expectations of schools as agents of social change.
Development of a National Policy

The beginning

Research into sex differences in educational processes and outcomes in Australia was carried out in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the context of the so-called sexual revolution. This research identified and questioned certain characteristics of Australian education, including girls' lower school retention rates, narrower choice of school subjects, and receipt of fewer Commonwealth Scholarship awards. It also drew attention to the lower qualifications of teachers in girls' schools, and to the fact that women were, in general, considerably less educationally qualified than men.

A 1973 Report of the Interim Committee for the Commonwealth Schools Commission drew attention to the shorter schooling of girls and recommended an investigation into whether influences in schools contributed to this outcome. In 1974, the fledgling Commonwealth Schools Commission sponsored an inquiry into the educational needs of girls and women that resulted in the publication in 1975 of the seminal report *Girls, Schools and Society*. This detailed sex differences in rates of educational participation, explored schools' role in gender role socialisation, and concluded that:

- girls are less likely than boys to remain in school beyond compulsory age;
- girls' subject choices limit subsequent educational and employment opportunities;
- females aged 16 to 20 are less likely than males of comparable background to be in full-time education;
- less than one-third of students studying for qualifications at post-school level are female;
- there is a great disparity between the sexes in industrial and technical training, which strongly attracts boys;
- women workers are strongly concentrated in traditional female occupations, and full-time women workers earn on average considerably less than men (and few rise to high levels of pay or responsibility);
- educational opportunities for women re-entering the workforce are very limited;
- girls are less confident and ambitious than boys, less inclined to see themselves as able to influence their lives, and learn to define themselves as accommodating and relatively incompetent in public action arenas; and, furthermore, that
- what it means to be female or male in a particular social context is largely learned.

The Committee argued that schools reinforce gender stereotypes by using biased curriculum materials, not using materials presenting women in important social roles, failing...
to accommodate the needs of certain (non-stereotypic) families, under-valuing the skills of interpersonal relationships, and not appointing women to positions of high administrative responsibility in schools and school systems. It proposed a range of ‘directions for action’ on curriculum, teacher development and practice, promotion systems, vocational guidance, research, and continuing education, stressed the importance of national coordination of efforts, and recommended the establishment of an Advisory Committee on the Education of Girls and Women to progress implementation of ‘action directions’.

Working towards a national policy

The Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC) established a Working Party on the Education of Girls in 1981, by which time education Directors-General of most States and Territories had issued policy statements aimed at eliminating sexist practices. A 1980 Parliamentary Research Service paper noted that a ‘most explicit’ statement had come from NSW, but observed generally that, while there appeared to be broad agreement on principle, there was little sign of willingness to implement the hard options suggested in Girls, School and Society. This observation is echoed by Lyn Yates in The Education of Girls, where she notes that when the Commonwealth’s Curriculum Development Corporation led a 1978-9 discussion on national core curriculum, ‘...no attention was paid to the questions about biases and problems in school processes...identified by Girls, School and Society and many State reports.

In July, 1984, the Working Party presented its report, Girls and Tomorrow: The Challenge for Schools, which was proffered as a ‘first step’ in the development of a national policy on the education of girls. The preface to the Report stated that ‘Action is urgently required to redress the neglect of girls in classroom practices, to remove the limitations placed on girls’ aspirations, competence and opportunities by a curriculum which neglects women’s achievements and circumscribes girls’ life options, to allow women and men to participate equally in the governance of schooling, and to reverse the increasing predominance of men in school hierarchies.

The report noted that, despite convincing evidence in Girls, School and Society of the educational disadvantages suffered by girls, females continued to be disadvantaged by an education that limited their options in and out of school. Girls’ lack of appropriate prior study in mathematics, science and technology blocked their entry into much post-school training, education, and employment. Existing education systems, the report argued, produced and reproduced undesirable, gender-based divisions in society manifest in, for example, a high degree of occupational segregation by sex; the report observed that in 1977 the OECD found Australia had the ‘...highest level of occupational segregation by sex of all the countries it studied.

The report also noted evidence of distinctive, gender-based post-school education pathways: males predominated at TAFE and university, and females at colleges of advanced education. In terms of subject choice, the report observed that while girls had
made inroads into some areas previously dominated by males, the trend was accompanied by an increasing concentration of women in the fields of education, the humanities, and paramedical studies. The majority (60 per cent) of female university students in 1981 elected to study the humanities, education, or the social and behavioural sciences, while at TAFE women comprised the majority of enrolments in secretarial studies and non-vocationally oriented courses.

The Working Party recommended, among other things, the development of a national policy on the education of girls. In May of 1986, the Commonwealth Schools Commission presented the Minister for Education, Senator the Hon. Susan Ryan, with 'interim advice' on the development of a national policy on the schooling of girls. The report presented a 'framework for action', including values and principles, shared objectives and priority areas and suggested implementation and policy review processes, as a proposed basis for further consultation. The framework was endorsed 'in principle' at a June 1986 meeting of the Australian Education Council, and other consultations were to take place before the final report was submitted in 1987.

The most significant issues raised in response to the Interim Report included: the need for development of appropriate teacher skill and understanding, the relationships between gender and other factors affecting educational attainment, the need for recognition of the educational significance of the early childhood and primary school years and the role of parents in education, and the implications of the National Policy for the education of boys, particularly those being educated in single-sex schools.

In May 1987 the Commission forwarded its final report to Minister Ryan, describing it as '...completing the advice set out in the 1986 Interim Report, and taking account of the responses of major school authorities throughout Australia, as well as submissions and representations from major interest groups'.

The National Policy for the Education of Girls

The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools, the first national policy on schooling to be developed in Australia, was endorsed by the Australian Education Council and major non-government education bodies in September 1987. The recommendations of the Report are contained in Appendix A.

The stated purposes of the Policy were to:

- provide a focus for national concerns relating to the educational needs of all girls in Australian schools;
- provide an agreed framework for improving the quality of schooling for girls, through a synthesis of current system policies;
- clarify and strengthen existing system and school policies as a basis for further commitment;
• provide a means for identifying needs and priorities as a basis for future action;
• provide a basis for the development of specific programs at the national, state/system and school level;
• provide a reference point for policy development, including policies relating to school resource allocation;
• encourage the collaborative use of resources;
• provide a basis for monitoring and reporting progress.²²

The National Policy proposed a framework for action comprising a statement of educational values and principles, four broad objectives for improving schooling for girls, and an outline of priority areas within each objective. Core educational values and principles underpinning the National Policy were to '...provide a publicly acceptable basis for the operation of schools in Australia...to which all schools could reasonably be expected to commit themselves'²³. The inclusion of a principle stating that 'girls are not a homogeneous group' was noteworthy and represented, according to an Australian academic, a departure from earlier policy formulations where factors such as ethnicity, economic differences and disability were regarded as additional (not integral) to the understanding of identity formation.²⁴

Improving girls' schooling according to the values and principles made explicit in the Report 'translated' into the identification of four broad objectives, each with specific priority areas:

• The first, to raise awareness of the educational needs of girls, would promote the idea of equal capacity and equal rights in schooling, awareness of the roles and status of women, and would foster relevant research to inform policy.

• The second objective was to ensure equal access to and participation in a reformed school curriculum that would contribute to full and equal participation in economic and social life by 'avoiding bias in content and practices'.²⁵

• The third objective, to provide a supportive and challenging school environment, was to address the manner in which patriarchal power is reflected in school organisation and practice. Inclusion of this objective represented to some extent a new emphasis, inspired by evidence from research and school projects, on the issue of sexual harassment and intimidation of girls in schools.²⁶

• Objective four was to ensure the consistency of school resource allocation policies and practices with principles of equity and relative need, which would be achieved through review and provision of ongoing general resources to address the educational needs of girls.

One observer has commented that the National Policy set school systems the task of mainstreaming.²⁷ According to the Commission, the process of mainstreaming the National Policy into all aspects of schooling would involve taking into consideration:
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a) system policies for staffing, provision of resource and support services, research and school evaluation, curriculum and assessment review and development;
b) development and application of resource standards and related allocation procedures;
c) development of guidelines promoting practices consistent with the Policy;
d) development and application of measures to give effect to relevant sex discrimination legislation; and
e) the development of advisory structures and procedures related to Policy implementation.28

Endorsement of the National Policy provided an agreed framework for consolidating and developing action at the school, system, and national level, but the Commission recognised that implementation of the policy framework would '...be undertaken against the pattern of responsibilities for schooling, and the relative roles of the Commonwealth, States, Territories and non-government authorities29. Therefore the Policy document proposed 'illustrative' implementation strategies which government and non-government authorities were invited to consider in developing strategies for improving the education of girls.30

The inclusion of a policy and review process in the Policy document would facilitate 'documentation of gains', periodic assessment of objectives and priorities, and enable regular examination of values and principles.31 The Commission proposed a five-year reporting cycle, involving an initial report describing '...existing and developing programs in relation to the objectives and priority areas of the National Policy', three more focused annual update reports to include an '...assessment of progress and ...implications for further directions'; and a fifth and final review report to provide '...a comprehensive review of all elements of the National Policy'.32 Timelines and coordination mechanisms for the production of annual reports were discussed, but detailed reporting guidelines were not provided.
Policy Implementation and Review, 1987-92

The Girls in Schools Reports, 1988-91

These annual Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) reports summarised Commonwealth and State/Territory government sector and non-government sector initiatives in relation to each of the four National Policy objectives. DEET’s overviews of government sector activity in particular provide a valuable chronicle of achievement, limitation, and difficulties experienced endeavouring to coordinate and monitor national implementation of the Policy.

Objective 1: Raising awareness of the educational needs of girls

In relation to this objective the 1988 report observed of government sector initiatives that, while much activity appeared to be taking place, awareness-raising without appropriate teacher in-servicing and staff development was 'insufficient'; DEET observed approvingly in the next report that there had been an increase in the availability of professional development programs. The 1990 report noted greater creativity was being employed in awareness-raising activities, and that a broadening of educational target groups had occurred. By 1991, some States were making it a priority to engage whole school communities in critical discussion and analysis of educational provision in relation to this objective.

The Commonwealth reported doing the following during this period:

- funding (totalling approximately $0.5m) and managing a national awareness-raising information/promotional campaign, including the production and dissemination of information through The Gen newsletter, the Teaching Girls Bulletin, teachers kits, and a promotional video;
- establishing, managing and publishing a National Database on Girls and Education ($19,000); and
- funding appropriate gender equity/educational research projects to ascertain girls' educational needs (total research project expenditure approximately $338,000).

Suitable awareness-raising initiatives were also undertaken within the non-government sector. The National Catholic Education Commission reported a significant number of these, which targetted the values and attitudes of staff and parents. The National Council of Independent Schools reported similar undertakings, which it assessed as having 'some success.'
Objective 2: Equal access to and participation in appropriate curriculum

DEET's first report in 1988 observed that, while most systems had been engaged in at least one project with a curriculum focus, this was not in itself enough to ensure that students actually pursued non-stereotypic subjects or career choices. According to the second report in 1989 though, not only was the concept of 'inclusive curriculum' gaining currency, but careers education initiatives were promoting non-traditional occupations for girls. The 1990 report signalled that gender-inclusive practices were being incorporated particularly into mathematics, science and technology curricula, and that initiatives at the primary and secondary educational levels were focussing on work education. By 1991, some attention was being paid to the development of curricula to address the learning needs of girls from non-English-speaking, impoverished, rural, isolated, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

During this period, the Commonwealth reported the following:

- funding teaching practice and curriculum projects, eg, the Girls in Mathematics and Science Project ($1m), the Gender Equity in Curriculum Project ($3m); and
- funding the development of appropriate curriculum materials (totalling approximately $816,000).

In the non-government sector, the National Catholic Education Commission reported that its schools were reviewing curricula, providing careers education, ensuring girls' access to mathematics and science classes, and actively recruiting students to correct 'disproportionate representation'. And the National Council of Independent Schools reported it was providing equal access to appropriate curricula, offering comprehensive career counselling, and improving girls' maths/science participation rates.

Objective 3: The provision of a supportive school environment

The 1988 DEET report noted that while most systems were focussing on the issue of sexual harassment as a means of providing a more supportive school environment, more attention needed to be paid to the behavioural development of boys if such harassment was to be eliminated. The following year DEET observed that sexual harassment was increasingly being identified as a barrier to girls' success in education, but there was no reference to the attention to boys it had recommended the previous year. In 1990, DEET reported a significant increase in the number and range of strategies addressing the creation of a supportive school environment, including for example the development of abuse protection programs, and the pursuit of single-sex classes for girls. Sexual harassment remained the focus of States' work with this objective, and in 1991 DEET reported the development of policy, grievance procedures, training programs and curricula to prevent and deal with sexual harassment.
The Commonwealth reported funding the following initiatives at a total cost of approximately $327,000:

- projects addressing the creation of a supportive school environment, eg, investigating classroom practice and other and social factors affecting girls' learning and school retention; and

- projects to develop gender equity resources for school administrators and gender equity performance indicator kits to help schools monitor progress.

In the non-government sector, Catholic schools reported establishing self-esteem-raising programmes for girls and developing policies to counter sex-stereotyping in schools. Catholic and independent schools emphasised the importance of ensuring that schools provided suitable role models for girls.

Objective 4: Equitable resource allocation

DEET's first report argued there was a need to establish more visible mechanisms to ensure that resources in schools were allocated equitably, and its second report in 1989 expressed the need for 'improved mechanisms' for the identification of the gender basis of resource allocation. By the end of the next year at least the dilemma could be clearly articulated: jurisdictions did not seem to have any common understanding of what equitable resource allocation meant, or how strategies could be developed to address it. DEET's 1991 report suggests that not much progress was made over the following year, as all jurisdictions identified the need to address the objective more comprehensively.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth reported it had:

- incorporated gender equity requirements into Commonwealth program funding guidelines;
- used formal resource agreements with State/Territories to direct funding to gender equity-promoting projects;
- improved national data collection systems to facilitate monitoring the impact of capital grants on the education of girls; and
- required that half of AUSTUDY, ABSTUDY, homeless youth and Isolated Students Scheme beneficiaries were female.

The National Catholic Education Commission reported that Catholic schools were addressing inequities in resource allocation by improving girls' science, technology, and physical education facilities, and ensuring that equitable resource allocation strategies were in place. The National Council for Independent Schools reported that it was allocating more resources to science teaching for girls.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this segment, the Girls in Schools reports also provided some commentary on the challenges DEET faced in coordinating and monitoring Policy implementation. In the first report in 1988, DEET recommended that educational
systems develop frameworks, action plans and outcome indicators, and in the second report it observed that the most significant development of the 1988 school year had been the 'considerable improvement' in the collection of data to define the nature of problems and assess program effectiveness. DEET commented in the 1990 report that there had been progress in the development of 'system-wide action plans', but it stressed that future reports should include critical assessment of outcomes and evaluative statements, as well as descriptive material. In the final Girls in Schools report, DEET was still arguing the need for increased attention to the development of more effective and wider-ranging performance indicators.

The National Schooling Reports, 1989-92

The 1989 National Report on Schooling in Australia noted a marked increase in female participation in education; with approximately two-thirds of girls completing Year 12 in 1989 compared with only one-third in the early 1970s. The proportion of female students remaining at school to Year 12 in 1989 (65 per cent) exceeded that of male students (55 per cent); indeed, girls' Year 12 retention rates overtook males' in 1977. Prior to this, from around 1930 until the mid-1970s, boys had higher rates of educational participation at all ages above those of compulsory attendance.

The 1989 report also presented the findings of a study conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) into the subject choices of 47,000 Year 11 and 12 students; these were analysed by several variables, including sex. In relation to this, the report noted 'Within the study of mathematics gender differences were quite marked. In comparison to males, females studying mathematics tended more frequently to study non-tertiary oriented mathematics and less frequently to study advanced mathematics. And also, '...students studying humanities, social science and arts courses were more likely to be female'. Males predominated in mathematics, science, and technical and applied courses.

Information contained in the 1989 National Schooling report suggested that, while in 1989 slightly more females (49.6 per cent) than males (48.3 per cent) were continuing on to some form of tertiary study, tertiary fields of study were also gender-typed, with females preferring arts, education, and health-related courses, and males architecture, engineering, science, and agriculture courses. Although the 1989 female tertiary study rate contrasted sharply with that prevailing in 1971, when females comprised 28 per cent of students studying for post-school qualifications, the gendered pattern of study observed in 1989 was consistent with that observed in 1975 by the authors of the Schools Commission Report, Girls, School and Society. They had noted then that 'women concentrate in the Humanities and Social Sciences and Teacher Education while men predominate everywhere else, especially in the 'masculine' occupationally oriented areas of Science and Technology and the 'professions'.

Subsequent reports for 1990, 1991, and 1992 noted continually improving retention rates to Year 12 for both sexes, but a persistently higher one for girls which, at 82 per cent in
1992, was ten per cent higher than the male rate. The 1991 Report observed that the discrepancy in retention rates could be partly explained by '...the greater numbers of males entering apprenticeship training and TAFE courses after year 10, and the better employment opportunities for young males leaving year 10'.

National Schooling Reports for 1990-92 recorded also that:

- while increasing proportions of Year 12 girls were undertaking tertiary-accredited studies in 'male' domains, traditional preference patterns prevailed in high school and the tertiary sector, except that females dominated enrolments in business and economics at TAFE in 1991, and Year 12, tertiary-accredited economics and business studies enrolments in 1992;
- similar proportions of male and female school leavers attended tertiary educational institutions (although girls exceeded boys by four percentage points in 1992), but girls preferred universities, and boys TAFE/technical colleges;
- according to the results of a special study commissioned by DEET, there were '...marked differences in labour market outcomes according to gender and early school achievement', although these were not elaborated.


The 1987 National Policy document proposed that in the 'fifth and final year of the first phase' of Policy implementation, a comprehensive review of the elements of the National Policy would be undertaken. This would include an assessment of progress over the period towards achieving the objectives of the National Policy, and a reconsideration of policy directions for a further five-year period. As envisaged, review processes would entail widespread consultation with government and non-government authorities and groups.

The Australian Education Council appointed a Review Committee, comprised of representatives from each State and Territory education system, the Department of Employment, Education and Training, the National Catholic Education Commission and the National Council of Independent Schools Associations, to conduct a review with the following aims:

- to consult upon and develop a revised set of priorities;
- to propose key strategies to underpin the new range of priorities; and
- to advise on an appropriate structure for annual reporting, based on indicators of progress towards objectives.

The Review Committee and DEET commissioned two major consultancies to support the review process. One was an exploration of the views of educators, administrators, and 'the girls themselves', the other an analysis of girls' school subject choices.
The Committee commissioned educational consultants, Ashenden and Associates, to visit as many Australian schools as possible and '...to describe, anecdotally, the educational experience of girls in 1991'. The consultants questioned over six hundred educators and school administrators and eight hundred school girls (aged 4-18 years) from seventy-three government and non-government schools from every Australian jurisdiction in their '...formal consultation aimed at assessing the adequacy of girls' education'.

The educational consultants' report recommended the following six priorities for action:

- **Sex-based harassment**
  Levels of sex-based harassment in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools need to be reduced and the behaviour of boys needs to be altered as part of this.

- **Teaching practice**
  Teachers need to understand better the effects of gender on learning, and to alter teaching practice in order to be more effective. Single-sex learning may be useful here.

- **Curriculum reform**
  Curriculum needs improvement, and curriculum policy needs to ensure that all students participate in a balanced and broad curriculum covering skills and understandings needed for domestic as well as social, economic and political life. Design of curriculum components needs to reflect more strongly the needs, interests, and experience of girls, reflect the contribution of women and girls to society, and encourage critical awareness of the effects of gender on peoples' lives.

- **Careers education**
  Careers education needs to be more attuned to the complex interaction of influences involved in the endeavour of broadening girls' post-school options. Specifically, there is a need to reduce confusion caused by 'mixed messages' and lack of information about post-school options for women.

- **At-risk girls**
  Better services are needed for girls at risk of leaving school early. This includes passively alienated girls, pregnant schoolgirls, young mothers and girls who are required to undertake heavy domestic or work-force responsibilities that interfere with their schooling.

- **Listening to girls**
  The education system needs to listen better and respond to girls' views about their educational needs. This will ensure that issues that are of particular local concern will be identified.
Where Do I Go From Here?

The Review Committee's brief for this consultancy specified that the aim of the research project was to investigate and analyse girls' subject choices in senior secondary schooling to inform debate about girls' participation in certain subject areas. Consultants reviewed relevant literature and conducted interviews with Year 11 girls and school personnel in six schools in two Australian States. 92

Research consultants found 'noticeable' gender differences in subject choice, with female selections predominating in home sciences, creative and performing arts and languages, and males' predominating in technical, applied studies and physical sciences. Some changes over the period 1986 to 1990 were noted, suggesting a general (boys and girls) increase in interest in business studies and computer studies, a general decrease in interest in physical and biological sciences, increased girls' interest in mathematics and '...evidence of a movement of girls' preferences more towards the preferences of boys. 93 Researchers observed, however, that pressure to take mathematics and science to meet tertiary prerequisites, and to keep options open, had resulted in a narrowing of the senior secondary school curriculum, where less career-related subjects offering a broader 'education for life' were under-valued. 94

Authors argued there were no simple conclusions to be drawn from their study about senior schooling subject choice, 95 and chose to present their outcomes as a 'model for subject choice' that identified factors likely to impact on this; according to the educational consultants, each was worthy of further research. Model factors and elements included:

- Student background: including parental/family expectations, parental/family understanding of the educational system, and experiences of the student with career models;
- Students' prior academic achievements; and
- School factors: including information available, career education programs, individual counselling, encouragement or mentoring by individual teachers, prerequisites, flexibility, and differential resourcing. 96

In March of 1993 the product of the review process, the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97, was introduced by the Chair of the Australian Education Council. The Plan document included a synopsis of the findings of the two review consultancies and some general, summary observations of the Review Committee. The Review Committee identified the following as significant post-1987 educational developments:

- devolution policies resulting in greater school self-management, an associated strengthening of centralist policy-making, increased community participation in education, and greater accountability requirements;
- 'significant' improvements in post-compulsory schooling retention rates for both sexes, but continuing inequitable outcomes for girls, and markedly less success amongst particular groups of girls;
real reductions in resources available to schools;
• the release of key reports on employment-related competencies and entry-level training;
• an increased recognition of the importance of early childhood experiences in shaping educational outcomes.\(^97\)

Commenting generally on the success of the first five years of Policy implementation, the Review Committee noted that some policy objectives were easier to achieve than others. There had been, for example, a 'significant' rise in the awareness about the educational needs of girls, but less progress with objectives relating to curriculum reform and equitable resource allocation.

**Criticisms of the National Policy**

Academic commentators on the National Policy observed the following about Policy implementation:

• while considerable activity had taken place to raise awareness of the educational needs of girls, not enough had been done to ensure that awareness was raised in all teachers and schools, and there was not enough understanding of what constituted 'good practice'\(^98\);
• the focus of the Policy's curriculum objective was narrowly defined in terms of mathematics, science, and technology studies, and discussion of post-school options was similarly narrowly focussed\(^99\);
• the objective to provide a 'supportive and challenging school environment' had focussed more on the 'supportive' rather than the 'challenging' aspect\(^100\);
• lack of consensus on the meaning of 'equitable resource allocation' was prevalent and understandable, as the construct was not 'self-explanatory'\(^101\);
• Policy implementation had led neither to incremental nor to constant progress as there had been '...no sense of building on existing experience to work out more effectively what might have some impact'\(^102\);
• The Policy framework could provide a basis for 'exponential' progress, but only if initiatives became 'mainstream', and mainstream curriculum policy did not appear to have been much affected by the '...vague commitments of the National Policy'\(^103\).

Perhaps more importantly, critics argued that inadequate theorising of the complex inter-relationships of gender, social class, ethnicity, and power, related to the limitations of the Policy's predominantly liberal feminist underpinnings, had resulted in ineffective attention to certain key issues. Yates, for example, described how 'universalising' and patronising tendencies of reforming liberalism contributed to a failure to effectively address the educational needs and interests of working class and non-English-speaking girls\(^104\).
Similarly, Jane Kenway related the Policy's liberal feminism to inadequate theorising of the relations of gender, sexuality, education and power and, specifically, the 'problem' of boys' education, which she described as 'a submerged theme' in the Policy document and a 'sensitive, highly contested issue in the policy field'. 'Clearly', she argued, 'if one accepts gender is a relational concept then one recognises the important need to reconstruct the boys'. But the Policy's under-developed theoretical base enabled only superficial, naive understanding of issues and their educational implications.
Recent Developments

The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls

The outcome of the review of the operation of the National Policy, the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97*, was endorsed by Ministers at the 68th meeting of the Australian Education Council in September 1992. 106

A short section on the review of the National Policy contained in the *Action Plan* argues that sex discrimination continues to '...actively operate to exclude women and girls', and that the need for the original Policy was confirmed by the review. The Policy is '... as relevant and necessary now as it was in 1987', and the purpose of the *National Action Plan* is not to replace the 1987 Policy, '...but rather to add a new dimension to its usefulness in Australian schools'. 107

The Introduction to the *National Action Plan* states that 'It is obvious that the shift required in Australian culture to establish the outcomes of the National Policy may take many years and will require continuing commitment from the education community in all parts of Australia' 108.

The framework and objectives forming the substance of the 1987 National Policy provide the fundamental underpinning of the *National Action Plan*, which is distinguished principally by its identification of eight new priority areas to '...provide direction for the education of girls from 1993-97' 109.

The eight priorities identified in the *National Action Plan* are:

- **Examining the construction of gender**
  Strategies include developing policies, curricula, and professional development programs that take account of: the role of language; the abuse of power in relationships; violence; body images, media and anorexia; the role of 'popular cultural texts', eg, videos and computer games; the influences of family, peers, and community;

- **Eliminating sex-based harassment**
  Schools and school systems are to develop sexual harassment policies and grievance procedures, professional development programs, comprehensive (kindergarten through Year 12) curricula, and information materials for the wider community;

- **Improving the educational outcomes of girls who benefit least from schooling**
  Strategies include monitoring educational participation and outcomes, developing and implementing racial harassment policies and procedures, providing suitable professional development programs, career counselling, organising community discussion forums, improving literacy skills, providing information in different languages, and improving the representativeness of teachers and support staff;
• **Addressing the needs of girls at risk**
  Monitoring and collaboration mechanisms are to be established, and suitable professional development/community education programs provided;

• **Reforming the curriculum**
  Schools and school systems should develop and implement non-discriminatory assessment procedures, review existing curricula and develop gender-inclusive guidelines, provide access to all areas of the curriculum and ensure students have the skills to benefit from access, teach boys and girls domestic skills, and provide comprehensive relationship and human sexuality programs;

• **Improving teaching practice**
  A range of teaching methods and assessment procedures should be employed, and equitable assessment procedures identified, gender-equity-sensitive staff selection and promotion criteria should be established, research into pedagogical practice should be supported, and materials to facilitate assessment and evaluation of pedagogical procedures should be developed;

• **Broadening work education**
  Curricula that critically examine the gender distribution of work in families, households and paid work should be developed, vocational educational programs should be reviewed for gender-differentiated information and experiences, suitable professional/community development programs should be developed, independence-enhancing career and subject-choice advice should be provided, and post-school pathways and destinations should be monitored;

• **Changing school organisation and management practice**
  Schools and school systems should review and adapt policies, procedures and resource allocation to satisfy gender equity requirements and provide training to the school community about inclusive management practices, and ensure adequate provision for girls' physical needs.

The *National Action Plan* presented an altered reporting 'framework' to be comprised of annual *National Schooling Reports* and a new series of annual *Girls in Schools* reports, each of which would specifically focus on one or more of the areas for priority action. The statistical annexes accompanying the *National Schooling Reports* were to include data on literacy and numeracy levels, achievement in learning areas, students' records of performance on key employment-related competencies, and information on student pathways.

*Girls in Schools 1993* was published in May 1995. Tellingly, the foreword acknowledges that the reporting process was 'not without difficulties'. The Report is described as different in that it does not focus exclusively on girls, and it is the first to attempt to document *National Action Plan* implementation gains. The first Report was to address the priorities 'Improving teaching practice' and 'Broadening work education', for which performance indicators had been identified in the *Action Plan*. 
In relation to the 'Improving teaching practice' priority, *Girls in Schools 1993* reported on one of three performance indicators concerned with girls' and boys' curricular participation rates and attainment levels. 1992 DEET data was analysed to reveal that more females than males were enrolled in tertiary entrance accredited courses in most States, retention rates for girls slightly exceeded boys', girls' overall attainment levels were higher than boys', but well-established gendered subject preference patterns prevailed. More evidence of this latter was provided in the *1993 National Report on Schooling*, which summarised the results of a large (n=20,000) national survey of the subject choices of Year 11 and Year 12 students as demonstrating that:

- gender accounted for a considerable variation in subject area enrolments — males predominated in the physical sciences, mathematics, and technical studies, while Languages Other Than English (LOTE), home economics and, to a lesser extent, the biological and other sciences were the subject areas in which females predominated

- female students were more likely than males to nominate intrinsic reasons (eg interest, enjoyment) for subject choices, while males were more likely to nominate extrinsic reasons (eg future work and study) for their choices.

The second *National Action Plan* priority to be reported upon in 1993 was 'broadening work education'. *Girls in Schools 1993* reported (again, in relation to only one of three performance indicators) that, while females comprise the majority (53.4 per cent) of total tertiary enrolments, traditional patterns of participation prevail, despite some evidence that enrolments in non-traditional areas are increasing. Similar gendered subject choice distributions prevail at TAFE, where the percentage of women enrolling in engineering, architecture/building and agriculture courses has actually declined since 1987. The percentage of women involved in apprenticeships (12 per cent) has remained unchanged since 1987. The Report noted with interest that females are under-represented at the postgraduate study level, even in areas where women predominate at the under-graduate level.

The 'What About the Boys?' Debate

As has been noted earlier, academic commentators on Australia's gender in education policy have criticised its exclusive focus on girls '...as if the issue of gender were solely a question of female behaviour on an educational desert island', and argued that equitable outcomes for girls (in and out of school) will not be achieved without attending to boys' education.

Concern about boys emerged as a 'key message' in one of the consultancies undertaken for the review of the National Policy in 1991. Authors of the consultancy report, *Listening to Girls*, explained that sometimes concern about boys reflected disbelief in girls' educational disadvantage, but other times a real conviction that '...if mutual understanding and tolerance between the sexes is to be achieved, the education of boys needs to change'. Boys needed
to be educated about sexual harassment, changing sex roles, and helped to develop skills in cooperation, communication, and tolerance.

The matter of boys' education appears to have become a sensitive public policy issue by 1990, when the third Girls in Schools report referred to 'tensions' between 'two major approaches adopted' by State and Territory Governments. The report elaborated that 'Some States address girls' educational issues explicitly under the education of girls title using special measures to counter the recognised disadvantage which has accrued to women and girls in our society...Others, under the title 'gender equity', while addressing girls' educational and social disadvantage may also use measures to address those behaviours exhibited by boys which inhibit girls' access to full participation in education. There is concern in some quarters that activities under the title 'gender equity' can, by directing some funds to programs for boys, too easily allow girls' issues to be diluted and programs to be redefined to distribute resources equally among girls and boys, or even promote programs which enhance boys' educational advantage. Clearly, in cases where such concerns are justified, the activities undertaken are unlikely to bring about the desired change in girls' educational outcomes or ultimately in women's position in our society'.

Two years later there was formal acknowledgement of the importance of boys' education (at least, as it relates to girls' education) when a new government advisory committee was established. The National Advisory Committee on the Education of Girls was set up in 1992 when the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-7 was endorsed by the Australian Education Council. The Committee's terms of reference included providing general advice, monitoring Action Plan implementation and coordinating national reporting, but also providing '...supplementary advice on strategies for boys in relation to achievement of the objectives of the National Policy for the Education of Girls...'.

The National Advisory Committee on the Education of Girls was reconstituted in early 1994 as the National Gender Equity in Schools Task Force with terms of reference to:

- monitor the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls;
- provide advice to national committees and working parties on gender equity issues;
- provide advice on the best practice in the education of boys as it relates to the education of girls;
- identify, in consultation with experts in the field, further strategies for implementing the priority areas, pathways which facilitate positive outcomes for girls throughout life, and key areas for further development;
- build on the work to date in the area of gender equity as it relates to the education of girls and on outcomes/ findings of review of gender issues in the education of boys;
- report on programs currently in place in states and territories which primarily support the education of boys in their operation (eg behaviour management and remedial education programs) and to report on research currently underway in States and Territories, and
• provide advice to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) for further work which would facilitate State and Territory collaboration in addressing the educational disadvantage of groups of boys.

A current list of Taskforce members is at Appendix B.

The Chair of the new Taskforce, Cheryl Vardon (Secretary of the ACT Department of Education and Training), outlined her view of the role of the Taskforce in an interview published in DEET's newsletter, The Gen, in March, 1994. Ms Vardon stressed that, while interest in boys' education could be construed as a backlash to channel resources away from girls' programs, '...the issue of boys' education moves beyond that to the more important argument that the way boys behave, particularly violent boys, impinges on girls' self esteem and girls' futures'. She described the Taskforce's new emphasis on boys as 'evolutionary' but emphasised that improving outcomes for girls was still the 'key priority'. It's very important for us to analyse the impact of boys' behaviour on girls, and in doing that we'll look at programs for boys which actually improve things for girls.

Public interest in the subject of boys' education has intensified over the past two years, and much of this can be attributed to media coverage of an investigation into boys' education in New South Wales. In 1994, the NSW Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs asked a Government Advisory Committee to investigate boys' education in NSW, and to make recommendations on the future focus of gender equity policies in that State. The Committee's report, known as the O'Doherty Report (after the Committee's Chair, State MP Stephen O'Doherty), outlined the 'nature of the problem' and recommended the development of an inclusive gender equity strategy. The full text of the Committee's recommendations is at Appendix C.

The 'nature of the problem' was described by the O'Doherty report in terms of educational and social factors. In relation to education, key Committee observations were that in New South Wales:

• the majority (65 per cent) of students in 'special' and 'support' classes are male;
• compared with girls, boys under-perform in literacy tests and achieve notably lower grades in English;
• for thirteen years, girls' mean Tertiary Entrance Scores have been higher than boys';
• boys' post-compulsory school retention rates are consistently lower than girls', but what this means is unclear, as many school leavers are moving on to TAFE;
• boys are over-represented in patterns of courses associated with the least successful HSC outcomes;
• boys are under-represented in the total available university and TAFE places;
• for each group analysed (all students, non-English speaking background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and rural), average Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) was substantially lower for boys than for girls, and the difference has increased over the past three years.
As for 'social and other factors', the Committee noted the following concerns:

- boys are uncommunicative and have trouble fitting in with existing support mechanisms, despite the fact that they are more likely to need welfare assistance;
- boys fear ridicule and bullying if they excel anywhere except in the sporting field;
- boys have fewer conflict resolution skills than girls, and many believe that physical confrontation is an acceptable way of resolving conflict;
- many boys have low self-esteem, expect to be unemployed, and display less certainty about the future than girls;
- boys represent the majority of behaviour problem students;
- perpetrators of violence in schools are virtually always boys, and girls and boys are victimised by this aggression;
- there is a lack of appropriate male role models in the media, the community, schools, and in some families;
- while the vast majority (80 per cent) of primary classroom teachers are female, two-thirds of non-teaching executives are male;
- many boys reject reading as boring and girlish, and three times as many are receiving special assistance with it;
- parents, teachers, and students all reported a lack of widely available, suitable, popular reading material for boys;
- boys are much more likely than girls to suicide;
- boys engage in other forms of self-destructive behaviour, eg dangerous driving, which kills three times more young males than females;
- boys account for over 80 per cent of appearances in the NSW Children's Courts;
- boys are more likely to suffer from certain learning disabilities, eg, Attention Deficit Disorder;
- the vast majority (256/317) of children identified with serious language disorders are boys;
- boys are less confident, articulate, and skilled in interpersonal relations than girls.

The O'Doherty Report provided a reference point for papers delivered at a 'Promoting Gender Equity' Conference in Canberra in early 1995. The Conference, held under the auspices of the Gender Equity Taskforce of MCEETYA, was designed to assist the Taskforce in addressing some of the central questions about gender and educational disadvantage arising from its terms of reference.

In her opening address to the Conference Ms Sue Walpole, federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, expressed her great concern about the matters raised in the O'Doherty Report, saying she knew '...the life experience of many boys and men is impoverished by restrictive and self-destructive notions of masculinity', and that boys need to be 'assisted' to...
challenge aggressive behaviour and to ensure a more equitable distribution of unpaid work.\textsuperscript{128}

However, she placed her concern about boys into broad gender equity context by arguing '...the reality is that post-school pathways for many women continue to be inhibited or prescribed by their gender', and illustrating her point by citing what she described as 'a few important facts':\textsuperscript{130}

- Australia continues to have one of the most gender segregated workforces in the industrialised world, with women concentrated in lower paid positions with less job security and fewer opportunities for promotion. Forty-three per cent of all women workers are employed in only two occupations - clerks and sales assistants;

- Women are seriously under-represented in management positions. In the Australian Public Service, where formal EEO strategies have been in place for a number of years, women hold only 13.1 per cent of all senior executive positions. (This figure has since risen to 17.7 per cent.) In the private sector, the proportion is much lower;

- Women earn less than men. Women's average earnings are 83 per cent of average male earnings, although the pay gap is more marked in certain occupations and industries.\textsuperscript{132} Discriminatory provisions still pervade the award system, and the majority (76 per cent) of part-time positions are filled by women. Women also perform 70 per cent of unpaid work in the home.

The Sex Discrimination Commissioner concluded her address by signalling her approval that O'Doherty had not recommended a separate boys' education strategy. In her address to the Conference, Jane Kenway echoed the Commissioner's sentiments when she praised the O'Doherty Report for its rejection of what she termed the 'flawed notion' of a separate boys' education strategy, ie for its agreement that boys' programs should not be developed at the expense of girls. However, she criticised the Report for being 'hamstrung' by conservatism, '...some rather dated ideas about where to go from here with regard to curriculum and pedagogy', and also because it '...had very little to say about the education of girls in the context of its recommendations'.\textsuperscript{133}

The elements of O'Doherty receiving feminist approbation, ie its argument for an integrated gender equity strategy, explicit recognition of the importance of improving educational outcomes for girls, and refusal to polarise the 'debate' into arguments about relative disadvantage, are to some extent a reflection of the work of educational sociologist R.W. Connell. His rejection of oppositional logic and rhetoric is based on the belief that for males to 'decline the offer of power and pleasure made to them by the gender order' is consistent with their interest in, for example, reducing the emotional and physical costs of patriarchy, and promoting the welfare of women.\textsuperscript{134} As he writes in\textit{ Masculinities}, 'In the context of the broad delegitimation of patriarchy, men's relational interests in the welfare of women and girls can displace the same men's gender-specific interests in supremacy'.\textsuperscript{135}
On the subject of gender-equity promoting educational strategies for boys, Connell and others have pointed out that:

- There is now considerable practical experience with gender-specific programs for boys from the US, Britain, Germany, and Australia. Whole-school programs are much less common, but programs operating across the curriculum, rather than in specialised units, make sense.¹³⁶

- Educational programs for boys should start with boys' own interests, experiences and needs, and work should be driven by the claims of justice, rather than the pressure of guilt.¹³⁷ The importance of working with boys in a 'respectful' manner has been identified as one of three principles for practice in the delivery of gender equity programs for boys;¹³⁸

- Suitable pre-service and in-service training programs for teachers need to be developed.¹³⁹ Mr John Dunn, Principal of Canberra's Caroline Chisolm High School, made this point in his address to the Canberra Gender Equity Conference; he argued that such training should be regarded as a major priority. Mr Dunn also recommended that wider school communities be educated to promote understanding of the purposes of gender equity programs;¹⁴⁰

- Confrontational discipline systems in schools need to be changed to stop 'cycles of aggression'.¹⁴¹
Conclusions

Evaluating social interventions is always difficult because these are never conducted in perfectly controlled circumstances, and uncontrolled variables mean causal relationships cannot be established, at least with any degree of confidence. Commenting on the impacts and outcomes of the initiatives outlined in this paper is further complicated by the contested nature of the subject of the intervention, and the amorphous, dynamic context of national policy implementation. However, evaluations of social endeavours are always problematic and with appropriate qualifications, some general remarks are possible.

Impact evaluations typically involve assessing the degree of attainment of program or project objectives; an impact evaluation of the National Policy would therefore involve reflecting on the extent to which Policy objectives have been realised. Evidence presented in this report suggests that, at best, success to date could be described as modest. Undoubtedly, in some quarters there has been awareness-raising about the educational needs of girls, and constructive attention has been paid to the reform of school curriculum and practices, including resource allocation, staff recruitment and development. But overall, progress has been uneven and some have observed, perhaps unkindly, that activity has been most concentrated in areas most removed from practical application, eg in bureaucratic and academic establishments.

Outcome evaluations usually attempt to establish whether certain long-term goals have been achieved. While the National Policy did not articulate specific long-term goals, the conclusions of the 1975 report *Girls, Schools and Society* provide a useful basis for comparison with the present. Authors noted with concern then that girls were less likely than boys to remain in school beyond compulsory age, or to be engaged in post-school education of any kind. Not only are these social facts now no longer true, but concern has shifted somewhat and begun to focus upon the problems of boys in schools.

Improvements in rates of girls' educational participation are not directly attributable to the 1986 National Girls in Schools Policy. Girls' school retention rates began to improve in the 1960s and surpassed boys' in the mid-1970s, a decade before the National Policy was formulated. Similarly, girls' participation in the tertiary education sector began to improve in the mid-1970s, well before the National Policy was devised. It could be argued, of course, that Policy-related activities facilitated, supported, even promoted these noteworthy developments.

While girls' school and tertiary education participation rates have improved and girls' collective self-esteem appears to have risen, some of the patterns observed in *Girls, Schools and Society* twenty years ago remain unchanged: subject choices (with their career-enhancing or limiting effects) are still strongly 'gendered', and Australia's labour force remains the most segregated by sex of OECD countries, with women over-represented in lower status occupations and earning, on average, less than men.
Modest achievement levels in relation to National Policy objectives, together with the apparent failure of Policy initiatives to impact on well-established patterns of subject choice, along with labour force segregation suggest that problems of conceptualisation and implementation may have limited the effects of Policy interventions. Unsophisticated conceptualisation may have inhibited potential advances by not informing practice sufficiently well, and weak national coordination and monitoring systems may have resulted, paradoxically, in an under-reporting of achievements.

Critics of the National Policy have argued that its principally liberal ideological biases resulted in simplistic educational prescriptions that placed too much emphasis on sex as a determining and unifying factor, and too little on other vital factors, such as race and poverty. Although Policy documents acknowledged the importance of these 'other factors' in the determination of educational outcomes, acknowledgement may not have translated sufficiently well into appropriately-targeted and potentially transformative school-based programs, policies and classroom practices. Conceptual naivete may have resulted in practical failure because what was on offer was not sufficiently meaningful, relevant, or helpful where it mattered, at the 'chalkface'.

Even if implementation of National Policy initiatives were not complicated by the imperfectly-conceived and contested 'nature of the problem' being addressed, it would be confounded by the practical difficulties of coordinating and monitoring Policy implementation across government and non-government educational sectors of nine (including the Commonwealth) different jurisdictions. Quite properly perhaps, jurisdictions exercised great latitude in determining their activities within a loosely defined framework, but synthesising and analysing vast amounts of essentially qualitative information, without the benefit of agreement on minimal data sets or performance indicators, must have been difficult to do in a manner that did justice to the plethora of Policy undertakings. It is quite possible that actual levels of achievement as well as certain kinds of achievement were under-reported.

The new National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97 and accompanying Gender Equity Taskforce appear to be taking measures to address some of the aforementioned conceptual and practical difficulties. Priorities are now more thoughtfully targeted and less gender-specific; inattention to boys' needs has begun to be corrected, and the development of a truly inclusive gender equity strategy is currently being contemplated. Reporting requirements are more realistic, and system-level performance indicators have been identified. Despite the latter however, the failures of reporting evident in Girls in Schools 1993 suggest that much more work remains to be done in this area.

Perhaps, though, it needs to be acknowledged there are limits to what can be achieved with National Action Plan implementation, because there are limits to the amount of social change that can be effected through educational systems. Teachers have been arguing this point for some time now.143 Schools are agents of socialisation, but even if all were to become perfect engines of gender equity, there are other social institutions playing a role in the production and re-production of social relations, and it is naive to imagine these will not
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exert influences driven by different interests. Social change involving relations of power necessarily involves resistance, even fierce opposition. This is to be expected in a pluralistic, democratic system. It means, though, that perhaps ambitious National Policy initiatives will always result in modest levels of achievement, and incremental change.

Endnotes


6 ibid., p. 1.

7 ibid., pp. 154-156.

8 ibid., pp. 156-157.

9 ibid., p. 167.


13 ibid., p. vii.

14 ibid., p. 3.

15 ibid., pp. 5-7.
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16 *ibid.*, p. 4.

17 *ibid.*, p. 5.

18 *ibid.*, pp. 9-14.


21 *ibid.*, p. iii.

22 *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

23 *ibid.*, p. 27.

24 Yates, L. *op. cit.*, p. 15.

25 *ibid.*, p. 31.

26 *ibid.*, p. 15.


29 *ibid.*, p. 37.

30 *ibid.*, p. 60.

31 *ibid.*, p. 61.

32 *ibid.*, p. 63.


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37 DEET. Girls in Schools, op. cit., p. 5.

38 DEET. Girls in Schools 3, op. cit., p. 7.

39 Reported in the first and second Girls in Schools reports, on pages 6 and 8, respectively.

40 Such activity was reported in the first Girls in Schools report on page 6, in the second report on pages 9-10, in the third report on pages 8-9, and in the final report on page 7.

41 This point was made on page 102 of the first report, page 88 of the second, page 98 of the third report, and page 95 of the final Girls in Schools report.


43 DEET. Girls in Schools, op. cit., p. 17.

44 DEET. Girls in Schools 2, op. cit., p. 19.


51 DEET. Girls in Schools, op. cit., p. 18.


54 DEET. Girls in Schools 4, op. cit., p. 15.


57 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 4, op. cit., p. 96.


59 DEET. *Girls in Schools* op. cit., p. 18.

60 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 2, op. cit., p. 20.

61 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 3, op. cit., p. 20.

62 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 4, op. cit., p. 15.


64 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 4, op. cit., p. 10.


66 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 3, op. cit., p. 110.


68 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 2, op. cit., p. 18.

69 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 3, op. cit., p. 17.

70 ibid., p.3.

71 DEET. *Girls in Schools* 4, op. cit., p. 16.

72 In April 1989, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers responsible for education agreed to collaborate on the production of annual national reports, based on a framework of ten common and agreed national goals for schooling. From 1992, all school sectors in Australia were meeting the Commonwealth's educational accountability requirements through this process.

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75 CSC. Girls, School and Society, op. cit., 1975, p. 31.


77 ibid., p. 14.

78 ibid., p. 19.

79 CSC. Girls, School and Society, op. cit., p. 47.

80 ibid., p. 43.


NB: As the number of apprenticeships has steadily declined since 1989, competition may drive up apprentices' school-leaving age and this explanation will lose some validity.


85 ibid., p. 23.


89 ibid., p. 43.


92 AEC. Where Do I Go From Here?: A report of the consultancy undertaken for the Australian Education Council Committee to Review the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools. Carlton, Victoria: Curriculum Corporation, April 1992, p. i.

93 ibid., p. ii.

94 ibid., p. iii.

95 ibid., p. 85.

96 ibid., pp. iii-v.

97 ibid., p. 1.


99 Kenway, J. op. cit., p. 72, and Yates, L. op. cit., p. 22.

100 Kenway, J. op. cit., p. 73.

101 Yates, L. op. cit., p. 23.

102 ibid., pp. 105-6.

103 ibid., p. 105.

104 ibid., pp. 98-103.

105 Kenway, J. op. cit., p. 68.


108 ibid., p. vii.

109 ibid., p. 3.

110 ibid., pp. 7-35.

111 ibid., p. 37.

112 ibid., p. 38.
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114 Details in relation to one 'missing' performance indicator are to be published shortly, and data relating to a third are to be collected in school surveys in 1994 and 1997.

115 MCEETYA. op. cit., p. x. More detail is provided on pages 55-6.

116 The full text of survey results are contained in the DEET/ACER publication Subject Choice in Years 11 and 12 by John Ainley, et al, Canberra: AGPS, November, 1994.


118 ibid., p. 8.

119 The Girls in Schools 1993 report notes on page xi that the National Advisory Committee for the Education of Girls decided that data for the second and third indicators would not be collected for 1993.

120 MCEETYA. Girls in Schools 1993, op. cit., pp. 82-84.


122 AEC. Listening to Girls, op. cit., p. 87.


127 1993 ABS data on suicide, summarised and discussed in Parliamentary Research Service (PRS) Research Note No. 2, January 1995, reveals a male youth (aged 15-19 years) suicide rate of 17 per 100,000, and a female rate of 3/100,000: the male rate is almost six times greater.


130 ibid., pp. 6-7.


133 MCEETYA. *Proceedings of the Promoting Gender Equity Conference*, op. cit., pp. 50-51.


137 ibid., p. 21.


139 Connell, R.W. 'Knowing About Masculinity', op. cit., p. 22.

140 Dunn, J. 'Addressing Gender Equity Through Boys' Programs', in MCEETYA. *Proceedings of the Promoting Gender Equity Conference*, op. cit., p. 324.

141 Connell, R.W. 'Knowing About Masculinity', op. cit., p. 22.


Appendix A
Recommendations of the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools report, 1987

Recommendation 1
That the National Policy for the Education of Girls comprise the following elements:
(a) **Preamble:** to outline the broad social context within which the policy has been developed, relating to the role of schools in achieving equality between the sexes, and in improving the status of girls and women.
(b) **Framework for action:** comprising a statement of educational values and principles; a statement of broad objectives for improving schooling for girls; and an outline of priority areas within each broad objective.
(c) **Implementation strategies:** action undertaken by school and system authorities themselves, consistent with the policy framework.
(d) **Reporting and review procedures:** for the assessment of progress; and the periodic refinement and review of the policy overall.

Recommendation 2
That the following statement be included as the preamble to the National Policy for the Education of Girls.

**Preamble:**
In Australia and throughout the world, attention has focused on the status of women generally, on the need to improve the conditions of their lives, and on the benefits of a society where women and men participate as equals in all aspects of economic, social and political life. Schools have a role and responsibility in contributing to the achievement of equality between the sexes, and in improving the conditions of life for girls and women. All Australian schools should ensure that what is being taught and learned does justice to girls and women, taking account of their cultural, language and socio-economic diversity, and is equally valuable for girls and boys.

Recommendation 3
That the National Policy for the Education of Girls incorporate the following values and principles:
- gender is not a determinant of capacity to learn
• girls and boys should be valued equally in all aspects of schooling
• equality of opportunity and outcomes in education for girls and boys may require differential provision, at least for a period of time
• strategies to improve the value of education for girls should be based on a recognition that action is required at both the primary and secondary levels
• strategies to improve the quality of education for girls should be based on an understanding that girls are not a homogeneous group
• priority in improving the quality of education for girls should be given to meeting the specific needs of those groups of girls most requiring support to benefit from schooling
• to improve schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, school authorities will need to take into account the unique culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
• a high quality education for girls is a mainstream professional responsibility for all educators in all primary and secondary schools and school systems
• schooling for girls and boys should reflect the entitlement of all women, in their own right, to personal respect, economic security and participation in, and influence over, decisions which affect their lives
• schools should educate girls and boys for satisfying, responsible and productive living, including work inside and outside the home
• schools should provide a curriculum which in content, language and methodology, meets the educational needs and entitlements of girls and which recognises the contributions of women to society
• schools should provide a challenging learning environment which is socially and culturally supportive, and physically comfortable for girls and boys
• schools and systems should be organised and resources provided and allocated to ensure that the capacities of girls and boys are fully and equally realised
• the effective change and lasting improvements needed in schools will require awareness and understanding of the educational needs of girls on the part of students, parents, teachers and administrators, and institutional support for addressing these needs.

Recommendation 4
That the National Policy for the Education of Girls incorporate the following objectives and priority areas:

1. To raise awareness in schools and in the wider community of the educational needs of girls in contemporary society by:
   (a) promoting awareness that girls and boys have an equal capacity for learning and equal rights in all aspects of schooling
   (b) promoting awareness of the roles and status of women and of the specific educational needs of girls
   (c) improving the information base through fostering relevant research and statistical collections as a basis for refining or developing policies and practices relating to the educational needs of girls.
2. To ensure girls and boys have equal access to and participation in a school curriculum which contributes to full and equal participation in economic and social life through:
   (a) Fundamental curriculum review and reform
       • to provide more comprehensive perspectives to broaden girls' understanding and options; to include study of sex and gender roles in society and their changing social relevance; and to overcome bias in content and related practices.
   (b) Specific areas of curriculum reform
       • changes to gender-stereotyped areas of the curriculum
       • changes to particular curriculum areas to enhance girls' participation and achievement
       • development of new curriculum to include important areas of knowledge, of particular significance to girls, which are presently omitted.

3. To provide a supportive and challenging school environment for learning in which girls and boys are equally valued and their needs equitably addressed through:
   (a) teaching and learning processes and classroom management
   (b) school organisation and practice
   (c) the social and cultural environment
   (d) the physical environment
   (e) an examination of values and attitudes relating to gender, sexuality and school achievement.

4. To ensure that school resource allocation policies and practices operate in ways which are consistent with principles of equity and relative need through:
   (a) review of system and school-level resource allocation policies and practices by school and system authorities, with particular attention to equitable provisions for girls and boys, and the need to overcome the effects of past practices
   (b) provision of ongoing general resources to address the educational needs of girls arising from effects of attitudes and practices beyond the school and past educational practices; and the differing needs of schools arising from socio-economic and cultural differences among the groups of girls they serve.

**Recommendation 5**

That Commonwealth, State and non-government school authorities develop strategies for improving the education of girls, within the framework of the National Policy for the Education of Girls, following consideration of the illustrative strategies in this Report.
Recommendation 6

Policy Review
That Commonwealth, State and non-government school authorities endorse and agree to participate in the reporting and review procedures outlined in Chapter 4 of this Report.

Recommendation 7
Appendix B
Gender Equity Taskforce Members

The Gender Equity Taskforce advises the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). It is made of senior representatives from school systems, national parent organisations and education unions from the state, Catholic and independent education sectors.

Membership of the MCEETYA Gender Equity Taskforce

Ms Cheryl Vardon
Chair, MCEETYA Gender Equity Taskforce
Chief Executive, ACT Department of Education and Training, and Children’s, Youth and Family Services Bureau

Ms Lyn Place
Coordinator, Education of Girls Program
Victorian Directorate of School Education

Ms Jo Diesel
Assistant Director, Social Justice Studies
Queensland Department of Education

Mr Jim Dellit
Executive Director, Curriculum Division
South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services

Mr David Axworthy
Manager, Student Support Branch
Education Department of Western Australia

Ms Alison Jacob
Acting Director, Educational Planning
Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts

Ms Barbara Henderson
Principal Education Officer, Gender Equity
Northern Territory Department of Education

Mr George Ellem
Principal, Campbell High School
ACT Department of Education and Training

Ms Ann Morrow
Chair, Schools Council

Ms Helen Leahy
Senior Policy Analyst, Girls and Women
New Zealand Ministry of Education

Mr Noel Simpson
Acting Assistant Secretary
Quality Schooling Branch, DEET

Mr Kevin Vassarotti
Executive Secretary
National Catholic Education Commission

Ms Joyce Hill
National Council of Independent Schools Associations

Ms Lori Beckett
Australian Council of State School Organisations

Ms Josephine Lonergan
Executive Director
Australian Parents Council

Ms Joan Lemaire
Women’s Officer, NSW Teachers Federation
Taskforce Member for the Australian Education Union

Ms Judi Quinn
Women’s Officer
Independent Education Union

Ms Heather Ridout
Convenor, WEETAG
The concerns expressed to the Committee about boys were remarkably consistent across the state and across socio-economic levels. These are of course generalisations which are not true of all boys but indicate worrying trends. They include boys' lack of communication skills, low self-esteem and their reluctance to be seen to excel except in sport. A key concern is boys' lack of dispute resolution skills coupled with the notion among many boys that physical confrontation is an appropriate way to resolve conflict. Some boys not only harass girls but seem unaware of the true impact of their behaviour. The lack of appropriate male role models in the media and the lack of male classroom teachers in primary schools were frequently raised as important issues.

A review of the academic indicators such as performance and participation, together with the problems reported both among boys generally, and within specific groups of boys, leads to the conclusion that there is a complexity to the problems experienced by boys. The recommended approach is to identify those things relating to gender which prevent individuals from achieving their full potential. We need to examine the values that lie beneath our assumptions about gender itself.

The attributes, attitudes and values that are part of society's stereotyped images of "femininity" and "masculinity" are for the most part unattainable for many individuals. In seeking to meet these images both girls and boys often suppress their true natures and create barriers to their education and life opportunities. In boys and men this can lead to attempts at asserting and abusing power, against women and children or against other men.

The Committee has made a number of recommendations which it considers will start the important process of assisting boys, and girls, to understand the reasons for particular patterns of behaviour and to question some of their own assumptions about what is and what is not appropriate. The recommendations will lead to students and their teachers developing skills and values which will assist in their education and help all students fulfil their potential in positive and constructive ways.

These recommendations are:

1. A Gender Equity Strategy

1.1 NSW should develop a Gender Equity Strategy in education. It should include programs for boys, programs for girls and programs for both boys and girls.

1.2 The Strategy should include, but not be limited to the following:

1.21 Programs should be developed to involve all parents, and fathers in particular, as active participants in their children's education.

1.22 Opportunities should be developed for members of the wider community to be involved in the educational programs of schools, to provide appropriate role models to both boys and girls.

1.23 Peer support programs should be implemented for all children, starting with a Transition to High School program in Year 6.
1.24 Current programs on sex-based harassment and violence in schools should be brought under the umbrella of the Gender Equity Strategy.

1.25 School discipline policies should be re-assessed in the light of the Gender Equity Principles and Strategy.

1.26 Students should be actively encouraged to participate in student leadership programs such as Student Representative Council.

1.27 Participation in cultural activities and the humanities should be actively encouraged and promoted as being highly valued for both boys and girls.

1.28 Four units of English should be available in a pattern of study for HSC candidates.

1.3 A set of Gender Equity Principles should be developed to underpin the Strategy.

1.4 Teaching of Gender Equity should be across the curricula.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 The DSE should identify a senior person with systemic responsibility for Gender Education.

2.2 Within each region, a senior officer should be identified with responsibility for Gender Equity within the Region, including curriculum advice and the provision of professional development and support in Gender Equity for all teachers within the Region.

2.3 Within all schools, Primary, Secondary, Central and Special, responsibility for implementing the Gender Equity Principles should rest with the executive, who should ensure that the Gender Equity Strategy is a mainstream program of the whole school.

2.4 In all co-educational secondary schools, a Boys' Program Co-ordinator and a Girls' Program Co-ordinator should be identified. Their roles would be to work closely with the regional Gender Equity Officer to help implement the Gender Equity Strategy, and make recommendations to their school's executive about the Strategy's further development within the school.

2.5 The Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Equality of the Sexes in Education should be restructured to allow its membership to better reflect an equal emphasis on the particular educational needs of both girls and boys.

3. Recommendations for Monitoring and Evaluation

3.1 Schools' progress in implementing the proposed Gender Equity Strategy should be a
mandatory part of all Quality Assurance reviews of NSW schools.

3.2 Further investigation should be carried out into ways of measuring and evaluating the success of the Gender Equity Strategy across a range of identified groups.

3.3 The Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Equality of the Sexes in Education should monitor the implementation of the proposed Gender Equity Strategy. Its Terms of Reference should be amended specifically to give it this task. The proposed senior officer responsible for Gender Education within the DSE should be an ex-officio member of the Committee and report to it on the implementation of the Strategy.

4. Areas Requiring Further Development

4.1 This Report should be distributed as a discussion paper to all interested groups.

4.2 More men should be encouraged into Primary School teaching and women into executive positions in education.

4.3 Gender Education should be incorporated into teacher education courses.

4.4 Further work should be done on methods of identifying students at risk of developing learning difficulties and associated behavioural problems throughout K-12, but particularly in the early years.

4.5 Further investigation should be carried out into the physiological differences between boys and girls as these relate to learning ability and specific reading difficulties.

4.6 Research should be carried out into the possible relationship between socio-economic level, sex and educational outcomes.

4.7 In the development of the Learning Profiles, the Gender Equity Principles should be taken into account.