



**A SUBMISSION BY THE
AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
TO THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE
RELATIONS, SMALL BUSINESS AND
EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED
AND TALENTED CHILDREN**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Australian Education Union is the union representing over 150 000 teachers and other education workers in public pre-schools, schools and TAFE colleges.
- 1.2 This submission will express the AEU's view on general matters related to the education of gifted and talented students rather than address each of the terms of reference in turn.
- 1.3 The AEU position is expressed within its Policy on Curriculum, as adopted at the 1993 Annual Conference (Attachment 1). Whilst it is important to see the position in relation to gifted and talented students in the context of the whole policy, section 12 "Groupings of Students" is particularly pertinent, is reproduced below, and forms the basis from which the comments below are derived. Numbers below refer to the numbering in this policy.
- 1.4 12.1 refers to opposition to streaming "for the reasons outlined". This is at 5.3. In particular, the following is pertinent:
 - 5.3 ... curriculum practice falls short of this aim because the goals of social selection and cost-saving administration often displace educational goals. In particular, schooling is often characterised by:
 - 5.3.1 The use of competitive assessment to sort students into separate streams and 'ability' groupings with the ultimate aim of facilitating social selection through education. This process is based on the incorrect assumptions that individual students have fixed levels of 'ability', and that students will achieve most if they are treated as passive receivers of learning and motivated by coercive methods. The reliance on competition and ability groupings actually discourages most students from high achievement, even while a minority are successful. Under these systems, many students must fail - a high level of failure is inherent - and most students become convinced that they have inferior learning potential. Reliance on competition is a primary cause of inequalities of educational outcome because students from certain social groups are advantaged by competitive selection methods. Competitive selection also sets students against each other rather than encouraging co-operative learning methods.
 - 5.3.2 Streaming students into 'academic' and 'non- academic' groupings. This practice reproduces the old mental/manual distinction in a new guise. Research evidence suggests that it does not necessarily improve the achievement of the 'academic' students; it certainly lowers the achievement of those categorised as 'non-academic' by persuading them of their own 'inferiority'. It also denies them access to knowledge and future opportunities and worsens inequalities of outcomes because the 'academic' stream is usually dominated by the socially advantaged students.

2 AEU Position

2.1 The following is the extract from the AEU Curriculum Policy referred to above:

12. GROUPINGS OF STUDENTS

- 12.1 AEU supports the use of heterogeneous groupings for learning purposes and opposes streaming for the reasons outlined.
- 12.2 Notwithstanding this general policy, the AEU recognises that the need for special education settings still exists for some students with disabilities, and that there is a need to make special provision for students who are being integrated into their own local schools from segregated special education settings. The withdrawal of some other students may also be justified in very specific circumstances, e.g. intensive English for newly arrived migrants.
- 12.3 AEU notes the conceptual confusion, but great political influence, of the notion of 'giftedness'. The concept is usually deeply flawed by connotations of generalised and innate abilities. Thus there are overwhelming inherent problems of measurement and of practical implications.
- 12.4 AEU recognises that there are many people whose performance in a valuable line of human activity can be consistently and repeatedly remarkable. However, the potential for remarkable performance is spread throughout society, and its manifestation is dependent upon complex systems of development, encouragement and opportunity throughout peoples' lives. AEU believes that all people should have access to such development, encouragement and opportunity - the nature of which varies according to individuals' needs, circumstances and aspirations.
- 12.5 Education systems have a responsibility to ensure the full extension of all students through an education which is rich and challenging in both the formal and informal curriculum.

This requires professional development and other support to assist teachers and other school personnel to :

- * understand and meet the individual needs of all students;
 - * constructively counter the anti-intellectualism manifest in various ways among some peer groups of students;
 - * appropriately facilitate and recognise enthusiasm, hard work and achievement in all valued areas - co-operative work and leadership within the school community; sporting, artistic or academic work; community service and supportive human relationships, and so on.
- 12.6 AEU accepts that students should not be retarded in their development through imposition of an artificial year-level achievement norm. However, the full extension of all students should take place through increased individual attention in the normal classroom. In some cases this will require smaller class sizes and increased relief time from face to face teaching, as well as professional development and other supportive resources.

- 12.7 The AEU opposes the withdrawal of so-called 'gifted' children and the use of accelerated progression. (This does not exclude the provision of extracurricular activities for practices with particular interests). Such practices have detrimental educational and social consequences for those students selected and those not selected. Such labelling of students (as 'gifted' or 'not gifted') limits options and opportunities, and limits self identities and the views others hold of them - it can become self-fulfilling for those labelled 'not gifted' and can create unreal and destructive expectations of those labelled 'gifted'. The inherent problems of defining and measuring 'giftedness' makes such labelling an arbitrary exercise.
- 12.8 The withdrawal of high achieving, creative or highly motivated students from regular classes denies other students the benefits of learning from and sharing in their enthusiasms and achievements. It is well documented that lack of participation by high achieving students has detrimental effects on the academic learning of other students. And all students have much to learn from a peer group which is diverse in cultural and socio-economic background; achievements, interests and aspirations.
- 12.9 The separation of so-called 'gifted' children or high achieving students from other students within schools or between schools (in selective public schools or de facto selective non-government schools) denies those students the powerfully educationally enriching experience of a diverse student peer group.

A uniformity of peers is stultifying; it impedes development of the understanding of the complexities of society, the ability to be adaptable and flexible, and the skills to communicate and have relationships with a wide range of people. This has profoundly damaging consequences for society if people with such a limited school experience move into powerful positions in society (as is often the case) as their experiences limit their capacity to understand and appreciate the circumstances of people unlike themselves and their privileged peers. Such segregation on supposed academic ability groups also serves to artificially perpetuate from generation to generation access to such powerful positions through the route of segregated schooling.

- 2.2 Advocates for gifted and talented students are prone to mis-interpretation of the AEU position. The following two sections are therefore intended to explain both what AEU opposes and what it supports more clearly.

3 Opposition to Segregation

- 3.1 The AEU does not argue that all children are equally capable in all areas, nor does it seek to “equalise downwards” or “teach at the pace of the less able”. It does, however, believe that with few exceptions the most effective way of maximising the potential of all students, both individually and collectively, is in a heterogeneous learning environment. This has both academic and social benefits for all children and for society as a whole. Polarisation between “excellence” and “equity” are false. The simultaneous pursuit of both in concert is mutually advantageous.
- 3.2 The AEU is therefore opposed to programs for gifted and talented students which have the effect of selecting some students for different programs which involve the bulk of in-school time, streaming, or other forms of segregated and selective education.

- 3.3 It does not disagree that some students may be considered more able than others in relation to certain criteria. However, in relation to any criterion, students are ranged along a continuum. It is not desirable to create divisions in this continuum, and thereby class some children as gifted or talented, and, by inference, the remainder as not gifted or not talented. This involves decisions which are arbitrary, undesirable, unnecessary and counter productive.
- 3.4 They are arbitrary because of the conceptual confusion between connotations of generalised and innate abilities, and because the measurement and selection of such students is imprecise, and generally in the end done on the basis of quotas rather than clearly differentiated abilities. The terms “Gifted” and “Talented” imply two different categories, and yet there are no clear distinguishing and operable definitions. In the end, most students are defined and selected on the basis of advanced academic achievement dependent on arbitrary per centages or cut off scores.

Clearly this also creates a category of students who just miss the cut off line, who are then not treated as “special”.

- 3.5 It is undesirable that students be segregated on the basis of academic ability. Being educated within a context of mixing with a variety of abilities is itself a valuable educative process. Growing up in a segregated environment, such as an academically elite environment, limits the experiences of those students and reduces their capacity to understand and appreciate the circumstances of people from backgrounds unlike their own. This is both socially and in many cases vocationally undesirable. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that such segregation is considerably influenced by socio-economic background factors, meaning that those children from homes with higher economic and social backgrounds are more likely to be selected. Selection then perpetuates and re-enforces existing social and economic decisions.
- 3.6 They are unnecessary, because the balance of evidence does not suggest that it improves educational outcomes either for those “selected” or for those not selected.
- 3.7 In fact, there is considerable evidence that both groups may in fact suffer lessened outcomes in a variety of ways. To this extent segregation is counter productive. (Some of this evidence will be considered below).
- 3.8 It is also of considerable concern that segregating students into groups based on ability immediately sets up competition for resources, and creates lobbies for funding some students at the expense of others. This has already been evident in the debates on the issue of gifted and talented students, as much of it revolves around the need for extra and separate resourcing.

There is considerable historical experience that once the divisions are established, those in the “more desirable” or “higher” category tend to get an unfair share of the resources at the expense of those who are arguably more in need of greater resourcing.

- 3.9 Programs of “accelerated learning” suffer from many of the drawbacks noted above. They assume that learning is a simple sequential progression and ignore developmental and other aspects of learning. They place students in groups which are often physically incompatible, and assume that learning is best carried out in a groups of roughly equal academic ability. This is not the case.
- 3.10 This should not be confused with cross age grouping of students. Such groups are not based on academic ability, and deliberately use the differences in age and ability to further learning and development.
- 3.11 Analogies with sports programs, which seem to be very popular with some advocates of segregated programs, are on the one hand spurious, and on the other illustrative. Such programs do not have the same universal objectives as education, and are therefore inappropriate for comparison. They are, however, intended to create elites, and ensure potential “winners” receive a disproportionate share of funding allocations specifically to separate them from others. This is an unacceptable principle upon which to base education.

4 An Alternative Approach

- 4.1 Rather than an approach which seeks to segregate out a selected group of students and give them different and possibly favourable treatment, the AEU believes that the emphasis should be upon facilitating the capacity of all teachers and schools to cater to the full range of needs and abilities of the individual students in their classes and schools.
- 4.2 Such facilitation should include:
- decreasing class sizes to improve the opportunity for individualised attention;
 - improving resourcing, including school libraries and computers provision, which encourages more individualised instruction;
 - more ancillary staff to work with teachers;
 - increased professional development with an emphasis on catering to the full range of individuals;
 - more diagnostic testing leading to appropriate individualised programs rather than mass standardised testing;
 - the inclusion in teacher education courses of a range of strategies for catering for all abilities and appropriate elements covering the needs of various categories of students such as gifted, disabled, etc.

- 4.3 This is not to argue that teachers are not currently seeking to achieve such an outcome, but to argue that their efforts could be more fully achieved with better support and resourcing.
- 4.4 Nor should the assumption be made that catering to individuals is only achieved through individualised instruction. Many group activities can allow for participation at a range of levels and be both academic and social learning experiences for all.
- 4.5 Such an approach benefits all students and would lead to an overall improvement in the nature of education.

5 Research

- 5.1 A recent paper by Craven, Marsh, and Print, “Gifted, streamed and mixed-ability programs for gifted students: Impact of self-concept, motivation, and achievement.” (Australian Journal of Education, Vol 44, No. 1 2000, pp. 51-75) is attached (Attachment 2). This paper both summarises and comments on previous research in the area of gifted and talented students, and makes a further valuable contribution to that research. The AEU believes the Committee will find it useful and informative.
- 5.2 The AEU would particularly like to emphasise the following aspects of this research which substantiate the AEU position.

In relation to research in general, the authors note:

- the substantial growth in the number of gifted and talented primary classes and secondary selective schools in Australia (and elsewhere) has not been based on well-established research findings;
- the effects on self-concept are important and must be analysed along with academic achievement;
- recent research based on social comparison and the big-fish-little-pond effect (BFLPE) supports predictions that participation in high ability selective classes or schools will lead to a decline in academic self concept;
- there is evidence that better performance by selectively grouped students occurs more because of educational advantages (such as additional resourcing) rather than the grouping per se;
- the evidence does not support a theory that so-called “gifted and talented students” will be benefited by attending selective classes and schools , and some evidence to the contrary.

In relation to their specific study, the authors found that, compared to students in the comparison group, those in the gifted and talented selective group:

- experienced more negative declines in all academic self-concept scales;
- had greater declines in mastery, cooperative and intrinsic motivations.

6. Conclusion

The AEU therefore believes that there is considerable evidence to support its view that:

- it should not automatically be assumed that specific programs for the “gifted and talented” work to their advantage;
- such programs may well work to the disadvantage of both those students in the programs and those not in the programs;
- the lobby for special programs for gifted and talented students has not been driven by credible research, and that much of the research points against selective programs;
- there is a danger that the substantial lobby that has developed for gifted and talented students will lead to a mis-direction of resources to them rather than to more individualised instruction.

The AEU therefore urges the Senate in its Report to set the education of gifted and talented students in a context of heterogeneous groupings for learning purposes and oppose streaming and other selective mechanisms and to suggest measures which encourage greater individualisation of schooling catering to the needs of all students rather than a selected few.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1

AEU Policy on Curriculum 1993

Australian Education Union

Policy on Curriculum

As adopted at the 1993 Annual Conference

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Australian Education Union

Policy on Curriculum

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Australian Education Union

Policy on Curriculum

1 DEFINITION OF CURRICULUM

- 1.1 AEU asserts that the curriculum is the totality of students' experiences within formal schooling. It encompasses the content, structure and assessment of the formal program of studies and also the administrative procedures, personal relationships and teaching styles in the school.
- 1.2 Ultimately, curriculum is the outcome of the complex interaction between educational institutions and society. Schooling is one of the sources of personal and educational development, alongside the family and affinity groups, the local community, the mass media and work. Schooling's unique contribution lies in its formal program of studies, together with the experience of living and working within a broad and inclusive social environment.

2 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

- 2.1 The curriculum is provided within a dynamic social, economic, demographic, cultural and political context. Schooling must be responsive to social change, without being simply reactive or jettisoning its own unique contribution to students' development.
- 2.2 Curriculum provision must necessarily take into account:
 - 2.2.1 The multicultural nature of Australian society, and the special claims of Aboriginal people who have been dispossessed by European settlement.
 - 2.2.2 The pronounced inequality in the distribution of social, economic, cultural and political resources and power between social groups, which restricts the life development of many.
 - 2.2.3 The role of the economy, the sexual division of labour, the dominant culture and the education system in reproducing inequality.
 - 2.2.4 Existing inequalities of educational outcomes exacerbated by credentialing arrangements, funding policies, assessment practice and other institutional arrangements.

- 2.2.5 The need to extend genuine democracy and collective social commitment through the empowerment of all people within a co-operative framework.
 - 2.2.6 The growing influence of the mass media and consumerism, which compete with schooling and family as a source of general culture. Although attractive to many students, the media tends to encourage passive individual consumption of a relatively narrow set of information and goods rather than critical thought and active learning and development within a social framework. Formal education must encourage in students the capacity to overcome the limitations of the media and consumerism.
- 2.3 In recent years social changes have profoundly influenced the situation of young people and the work of educational institutions. These changes include:
- 2.3.1 The collapse of the youth labour market, economic restructuring and technological change, which are associated with declining employment in traditional manufacturing and clerical occupations, casualisation and tendencies to de-skilling. These economic changes severely limit opportunities available to those school leavers who are already disadvantaged due to gender, ethnic origin or class.
 - 2.3.2 An increase in both the level of credentials and the level of numeracy and literacy required by many employers. This has encouraged retention in school and TAFE institutions and is associated with increased demand for entry into higher education.
 - 2.3.3 In some States/Territories, demographically-determined declining enrolments in primary and now also secondary schools. Many areas and communities find themselves struggling to maintain the level of educational services.
 - 2.3.4 Changes to the stability and role of the family, so that schools are increasingly expected to fulfil functions (including personal development and initiation into social values) once regarded as the province of the family. The pressure on schools is exacerbated by the earlier social maturation of students and the lack of consensus on many social issues.

- 2.3.5 The abovementioned growing influence of the mass media and consumerism.
- 2.3.6 Developments in science and other branches of knowledge, including computers and biotechnology, and a general increase in the sophistication and complexity of knowledge needed for both further education and day-to-day existence.
- 2.4 The rapid and massive increase in senior secondary school retention and rising demand for and participation in post-school institutions is fundamentally changing post-compulsory education. Retention to Year 12 (36 per cent in 1982) is expected to reach 65 per cent by 1992 and many more working class students are staying at school than ever before. This change has led to some proposals to explicitly or implicitly limit the value of the education received by these newly retained students, e.g. through an exclusive focus on the 'basic competences' or the establishment of 'low achieving' or 'non-tertiary' streams, often disguised with apparently progressive language. Greater retention should be seen as an opportunity to increase educational development and reduce past inequalities due to uneven participation.
- 2.5 In recent years, the resources available to public schooling and TAFE have been severely restricted due to general public sector restraint, coupled with the increased Government subsidisation of private schools and training. While not all improvements derive from resource increases, AEU asserts that the quality of education provided is directly influenced by the level of resources available and strongly rejects the 'economic rationalist' arguments that there is no direct relationship between quality and resources.
- 2.6 AEU also rejects the free market argument that education and training would be more valuable and efficient if dependence on private payment and market mechanisms was increased.
- 2.7 Economic rationalist and privatisation policies have already worsened existing inequalities of educational achievement and social opportunity and undermined public confidence in public education. These policies threaten to reduce the quality of the education received by the majority of students, who are enrolled in public education.

- 2.8 The total effect of these social changes and shifts in policy has been to increase overall expectations of schooling, at the same time as opportunities for young people have become more limited, the labour-market value of school credentials has fallen, counter-institutions such as the media have increased in influence, and resources for public education have been restricted.

Coupled with conservative political intervention, these trends have led to the rising preoccupation with educational 'standards', variously defined. Debate about schooling has increased, with the broader social pressures not always recognised; schools, teachers and the curriculum are often wrongly blamed for problems originating externally, and that can only be solved externally.

- 2.9 Such controversy further increases the pressures on schools and colleges. In this situation, Governments and the community should provide greater positive support. AEU deplores irresponsible attacks on public schools and colleges which can only devalue their contribution to society.

3 ROLE OF SCHOOLING

- 3.1 All schools and colleges should be organised and funded to provide, to all of their students, an education which:
- 3.1.1 Recognises that students are living in a multicultural and class-based society that is diverse and characterised by inequality and social conflict.
 - 3.1.2 Is valued for its intrinsic worth and which is of enduring relevance throughout the lives of people.
 - 3.1.3 Provides the basis for further education and training, including apprenticeship and other TAFE-based courses, higher education in universities and colleges of advanced education and recurrent education throughout life.
 - 3.1.4 Prepares students for worthwhile work and provides knowledge about the labour markets, productions, technologies, industrial relations and the rights of workers such that they are able to exert some control over their working lives.

- 3.1.5 Provides people with the necessary knowledge and understanding for the exercise of political rights within a cooperative and democratic framework and which encourages social action for the betterment of the society.
- 3.2 These areas are all important. AEU is opposed to narrow or instrumentalist policies that seek to reduce the work of schools and colleges to only one or another of these aims, most often the economic.
- 3.3 The efforts of Governments, educational administrators and educational institutions should be devoted to securing the highest possible level of personal development and educational achievement by all students. Policies that assume that only some students are able to succeed or are worthy of success are rejected.
- 3.4 Education should aim to produce more equal educational outcomes. This is not to say that all educational outcomes must be equal, but it does involve a recognition that the structures and practices of schooling must not promote and exacerbate unequal educational outcomes and that schooling must attempt to actively redress social and economic disadvantage through the provision of a comprehensive curriculum. In this process, education should aim to produce more equal educational outcomes by social group and to assist in overcoming inequalities between social groups.
- 3.5 In an unequal society in which job opportunities and higher education places are scarce, schooling cannot provide upward social mobility to more than a small handful of families; the widespread expectation of upward mobility has created an ill-based disillusionment with formal education. Schooling can encourage the highest level of achievement as a springboard for later life, but other changes are needed to open up much wider economic and social opportunities for all, including appropriate job development and industry policies and changes to the distribution of income, wealth and power.

4. ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLING

- 4.1 This AEU Curriculum Policy should be considered in conjunction with the AEU Policy on the Funding of Schools adopted in January 1984.
- 4.2 Schooling in Australia is organised on the basis of a dual public/private system in which subsidised private schools (all of them selective rather than comprehensive and many devoted to the social elite) operate alongside the comprehensive public school systems devoted to the whole of society.

- 4.3 The private schools define and partly monopolise the provision of 'academic' education and therefore preparation for the higher income-earning professions, especially medicine and law. They limit the role of public education in training for these elite professions, while it continues to be the main provider of other academic education and training for the trades and other manual occupations. The competitive and culturally-biased system of education and selection has enabled private schools to maintain a dominant role. This dual system of schooling is a pronounced cause of inequalities of educational outcomes and reduces the value of the education received by the mass of students in the public systems.
- 4.4 Reforms to curriculum designed to produce greater equality of outcomes and higher achievement by all must therefore not be confined to the public system, but must change the operation of the dual system as a whole. The development of a fully comprehensive system of public education should be encouraged.
- 4.5 AEU reasserts its view that the resource efforts of Governments should be wholly devoted to the public systems which are open to all. To provide the highest quality of education for all, a pronounced increase in material and human resources is needed.
- 4.6 It is the responsibility of State/Territory Governments to provide a curriculum guarantee to all public schools in order that they can maintain an extensive range of course offerings. This may require changes to staffing formulae to cater for the effects of declining enrolments.
- 4.7 Public schooling in Australia is administered on a State/ Territory basis and the precise mix of resources, structures and curriculum practice will continue to be a State/Territory matter.
- 4.8 Recently the standards debate and the initiatives of the Curriculum Development Centre have shown that broad curriculum policy has now become a national matter. This AEU Curriculum Policy is premised on the assumption that State/Territory systems should operate within the basic framework of responsibilities and policies outlined here, and that national co-ordination of the efforts of teacher organisations can assist the improvement of curriculum provision in the particular States and Territories.

5. ACTIVE AND DEMOCRATIC LEARNING

- 5.1 AEU asserts that the educational development of all will be maximised in a learning environment that is co-operative, encourages student self confidence, democratic experience and critical thought, and is active rather than passive. Such a curriculum necessarily requires a high level of rigour in the face of new learning tasks that are often demanding and difficult.
- 5.2 The desired curriculum combines the intellectual with the vocational, the theoretical with the practical, the reflective with the active. Thus the desired form of education is general rather than one-sided, and avoids over-specialisation and fragmentation.
- 5.3 However, curriculum practice falls short of this aim because the goals of social selection and cost-saving administration often displace educational goals. In particular, schooling is often characterised by:
- 5.3.1 The use of competitive assessment to sort students into separate streams and 'ability' groupings with the ultimate aim of facilitating social selection through education. This process is based on the incorrect assumptions that individual students have fixed levels of 'ability', and that students will achieve most if they are treated as passive receivers of learning and motivated by coercive methods. The reliance on competition and ability groupings actually discourages most students from high achievement, even while a minority are successful. Under these systems, many students must fail - a high level of failure is inherent - and most students become convinced that they have inferior learning potential. Reliance on competition is a primary cause of inequalities of educational outcome because students from certain social groups are advantaged by competitive selection methods. Competitive selection also sets students against each other rather than encouraging co-operative learning methods.
- 5.3.2 Streaming students into 'academic' and 'non-academic' groupings. This practice reproduces the old mental/manual distinction in a new guise. Research evidence suggests that it does not necessarily improve the achievement of the 'academic' students; it certainly lowers the achievement of those categorised as 'non-academic' by persuading them of their own 'inferiority'. It also denies them access to knowledge and future opportunities and worsens inequalities of outcomes because the 'academic' stream is usually dominated by the socially advantaged students.

- 5.3.3 Over-specialisation and fragmentation of the curriculum. While this does not occur to any great degree in primary education, it is a serious weakness in much of secondary education where it is related to the use of ability groupings, the use of mathematics/science as selectors for many courses in higher education, separation of students into mutually exclusive science and humanities streams and a major separation between students who undertake academic and applied studies. Early specialisation favours the socially advantaged who are more likely to inherit higher educational aspirations and creates a hierarchy and clear separation of studies. This situation denies the full purpose of education and encourages the training of people in the scientific and technical professions who tend to lack social awareness and a comprehensive understanding of the continuing culture. A general education and a democratic society necessarily require some familiarity with and confidence in all major branches of knowledge, and an ability to relocate these different branches of knowledge to each other through an interdisciplinary approach.
- 5.3.4 Education for those characterised as 'disadvantaged' which is limited to the acquisition of basic competences. The near-monopoly by the socially advantaged of developed intellectual education must be broken, if high achievement by all is to become possible.
- 5.3.5 Some administrative and educational practices that devalue the home and cultural background of many students. A successful learning environment can usually only be created when a student's own background is treated as positive and an effective relationship is established between the student's background and her/his school experiences. Learning is therefore assisted by parent participation in school decision-making, especially the participation of groups traditionally excluded from social power.
- 5.4 Nonetheless, schooling should not be seen as a simple linear progression from the 'known' to the 'unknown'. Students' right to acquire new knowledge and ways of thinking - and the obligation of the school to stimulate this 'leap into the unknown' - should not be obstructed by a fixation with learning process at the expense of content, or highly relativist policies that treat all learning as 'equally valid' or concentrate only on the immediate and the subjective to the exclusion of the abstract and the objective in learning. Both experimental and abstract learning are important.

- 5.5 The efficient use of resources is in itself an essential goal. However, the goals of efficiency and effectiveness are often invoked merely to save expenditure without regard to the educational consequences, frequently in association with the limitation of learning opportunities. In this regard, AEU expresses concern at the development of some input-output models of administration and budgeting, especially those which seek to tie educational programs to the measurement of student achievement as suggested by the Quality of Education Review Committee. Outcomes and quality in education are not in reality reducible to scientifically-valid numerical measurement and the attempt to do so can only lead to a narrowing of the curriculum to those aspects which are (apparently) measurable, and emphasis on passive and competitive learning as schools seek to demonstrate their 'efficiency'.

6. PRINCIPLES OF A COMMON CURRICULUM

- 6.1 The school curriculum should be common in that:
- 6.1.1 All students maintain a continuing association with major areas of learning including: language and literature, mathematics, science and technology, human society (including economics, politics and history - Australian and international, the arts (including music, drama, media, art and crafts), health and physical education.
 - 6.1.2 It is Australian in that it is worthwhile and of enduring relevance to the lives of people; inclusive in that it involves a recognition of the cultural contribution of all groups and moral in that it is based upon principles of democracy and justice and promotes the well being of the whole society.
 - 6.1.3 It does not deny any student access to any area of study upon the basis of judgements about their ability or through other institutional arrangements.
 - 6.1.4 It is premised on co-operation rather than competition and the prospect of success rather than failure.
 - 6.1.5 It is rigorous and promotes excellence for all. All students should be actively encouraged to achieve to the highest possible level.

- 6.1.6 The three elements of knowledge are recognised in the learning process: the source of knowledge, the content, the application of knowledge. Knowledge should be inclusive, relevant, Australian, and useable.
- 6.1.7 It encourages democratic co-operation and discussion in the classroom, and students are encouraged to assume progressively more decisions about their own educational development as they proceed through schooling, and schooling prepares students for active participation in society on an equal basis.
- 6.1.8 It encourages students to work together with others, to develop an awareness of group dynamics and group needs and to gain an understanding of each others' backgrounds and to overcome stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.
- 6.1.9 It encourages students to develop an awareness of how Australian society works and about contemporary social issues.
- 6.2 Resourcing implications for the development of a common curriculum include:
 - 6.2.1 Additional specialist teacher staffing in the primary schools to ensure the coverage of languages other than English, Music, Drama, Art and Crafts, Health and Physical Education.
 - 6.2.2 The commitment of staff and material resources to maintain the common curriculum (and its comprehensive nature) at all year levels (1-12) regardless of school size.
 - 6.2.3 A review of resource allocations and curriculum goals in schools and systems to ensure that the common curriculum is fully established in all schools and at all year levels as a greater priority than the great expansion of subject offerings in the senior secondary school.

7. LITERACY AND NUMERACY

- 7.1 AEU asserts that teachers are strongly committed to the attainment of universal literacy and numeracy. In the past, numeracy and literacy were not universally attained and while the rate of acquisition has improved so that only a very small minority remain functionally illiterate, a national effort will be needed to completely reach this goal.
- 7.2 AEU strongly rejects the propaganda claim that the numeracy and literacy of school leavers has declined. There is no evidence of such a decline, but there is firm evidence of improvements, for example (despite its limitations) in the results of the 1980 ACER study when compared with the 1975 ACER study, the 1977 Skillbeck review of 37 achievement studies, and the rise in the formal qualifications of teachers.
- 7.3 Numeracy and literacy acquisition cannot be reduced to the teaching and learning of a limited range of so-called 'basic skills'. Literacy and numeracy cannot be separated from general cultural acquisition and a fixation with narrowly defined skills can lead to the neglect of content. Literacy and numeracy are complex processes formed out of the whole learning experience.
- In this respect, active learning is a more effective method than rote learning which treats students as passive objects.
- 7.4 The provision of increased and more equal opportunities to enter further education would be a strong incentive to many students, encouraging them to strengthen their literacy and numeracy at the schooling stage.
- 7.5 The improvement of numeracy and literacy requires strengthened Governmental and community support for public education, including a general lift in the resources provided to primary education to provide smaller class sizes and more teacher time for preparation and correction; as well as resources for professional development, bilingual education, computer education and special programs to assist students with learning difficulties.
- 7.6 Parent education and appropriate support for pre-school educational experiences can be important in developing the foundations of numeracy and literacy.
- 7.7 Strategies for improved literacy and numeracy must include a restoration and improvement of government support for the professional development of teachers.

8. CONTENT AND VALUES IN THE CURRICULUM

- 8.1 Within the broad framework of student rights to a full curriculum as specified in Sections 5 and 6 of this policy, school courses should be constructed around goals that all students can achieve. Decisions about the design of courses and learning activities should take place at the school level within a policy framework constructed at school and central levels through representative bodies of school communities. More specific decisions about student learning activities should be made at classroom level through negotiated arrangements between students and teachers.
- 8.2 The school's curriculum should ensure that all students should have continued access to major areas of knowledge.
- 8.3 Traditional academic subjects have been criticised for their semi-artificial separation from each other; for cultural and social biases (for example through their language of discourse and through the exclusion of information about women and Aboriginal people); for concealing debates about values while claiming absolute objectivity; and for claiming a scientific rigour which they do not really possess. As a whole, academic subjects as conventionally presented contain markedly conservative social and political assumptions.
- 8.4 The appropriate response is not to jettison intellectual work itself, but to encourage a more critical treatment of the conventional disciplines and a more interdisciplinary approach. While needing renovation, the conventional disciplines are also a source of knowledge that is in itself empowering and useful and this knowledge should be available to all rather than being the property of the social elite. Moreover, students' interests would be harmed if subjects as such were abandoned for as long as they continue to be necessary for credentialing purposes and access to further education.
- 8.5 Questions about values are at the heart of most learning and use of learning. AEU rejects the claim that values questions should not be acknowledged or that in acknowledging them, teachers are engaged in 'indoctrination'. In this difficult area the task of schools is to bring values and debates about values to students' attention and provide them with the basis for making their own informed judgements.

- 8.6 Technological and economic changes and changes in social practices and values, together with their impact upon society and the environment, have posed significant challenges to the school curriculum in recent years. It is imperative that the curriculum should meet these challenges by rigorously addressing such issues as environmental studies, health and human relations, and war and peace. AEU rejects the argument that the curriculum should be value free and states that all issues which will have a significant impact upon the lives of people have a legitimate place within the curriculum.
- 8.7 AEU rejects proposals for a narrowly defined 'core' curriculum that would reduce all learning not included in the 'core' to a lower status. Rather, the curriculum should be organised as a unified whole in which all students receive access to the broad areas of knowledge outlined in Section 6.1.1.

9. ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 The forms of assessment used often tend to have a powerful and destructive effect on the breadth and quality of the curriculum. This is particularly obvious in upper secondary schooling, which is dominated by the requirements of competitive selection-oriented external examinations at HSC, but competitive assessment and 'ability' grouping influence the curriculum throughout schooling. For example, this is shown in the tendency for much of schooling to be devoted to easily memorable (and easily forgettable) facts at the expense of analysis and creativity. AEU asserts that the forms of assessment used should be determined by the needs of the curriculum rather than vice versa.
- 9.2 Assessment should therefore be used for educational purposes rather than for administrative or financial purposes, or for purposes of social selection. The major functions of assessment should be to:
- 9.2.1 Provide information about student progress in achieving the goals of the course.
- 9.2.2 Diagnose student learning difficulties.
- 9.2.3 Within schools, evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum design and the teaching methods used.

- 9.3 Assessment methods should be planned as an integral part of course developments and be executed in a manner which is supportive of the learning process. Consequently they should be planned and executed at the school level through co-operative and negotiated arrangements between teachers and students. Testing should have little part to play in such arrangements, and at best, has a minor diagnostic role.
- 9.4 Assessment should be continuous and participatory. Consideration should be given to the development of goal-based assessment systems, whereby students themselves participate in the construction of the goals of the course and the methods of assessment used, the process of assessment itself and the construction of further learning paths.
- 9.5 AEU rejects reliance on examination scores for social selection. Examination scores measure a 'moving target' and are arbitrary and cannot accurately measure the overall level of individual student achievement in a complex learning program. Examination scores cannot by their nature provide an accurate guide to future potential. Reliance on them has the effect of cutting off the career options of many students, or discouraging them and thus repressing their learning potential. Examination scores tell us little about a students' capacity or willingness to work in a specific occupation and are thus most unsuitable as devices for selection into employment.
- 9.6 Until governments meet their responsibility of providing access to tertiary studies for all students who successfully complete 12 years plus prep of schooling, Year 12 assessments will continue to play a role in admissions processes into further education. While Year 12 assessments should not be the only or the major basis for admissions to tertiary studies, those assessments which are used should be school based. School based assessments should be supported by guidelines and procedures to ensure consistency between schools.
- 9.7 AEU rejects any form of assessment which is
- 9.7.1 Competitive.
 - 9.7.2 Used to construct ranking of students or 'ability' groupings.
 - 9.7.3 Norm-referenced.
 - 9.7.4 Based on set year-level standards of achievement

9.7.5 External to the learning process.

9.7.6 Used for program administration; used for measurement of educational output, efficiency or 'productivity'; used to allocate funds or measure the value of programs; or used to assess the work of individual teachers for administrative purposes.

10. STANDARDISED TESTING

10.1 While committed to achieving improved standards of literacy and numeracy, AEU strongly rejects the administrative use of standardised tests of student achievement such as those employed in the 1975 and 1980 ACER National Testing Program or the State/Territory wide competency tests proposed by the Quality of Education Review Committee. AEU is strongly opposed to such practices, in the light of international experience of testing systems, because they lead to a lowering of the quality of education and the overall level of student achievement, and because of the questionable educational validity of the instruments of testing. In particular :

10.1.1 System administrators and/or individual schools, seeing their work judged in terms of test results, naturally seek a concentration on narrow competency learning and practice testing as a method of improving test results and this inevitability leads to a withdrawal of resources and effort from those parts of the curriculum not subject to the tests.

10.1.2 In turn, this produces a narrowing of the curriculum with less emphasis on curriculum content, and less emphasis on such functions as creativity, problem-solving, personal development and social development, which are socially and individually beneficial.

10.1.3 A focus on minimum levels of competency tends to lead to a neglect of efforts to achieve the highest possible standard of achievement.

10.1.4 The emphasis on externally-based testing de-skills teachers by downgrading the need for and the value of professional judgements. Teacher tend to become reduced to test administrators.

- 10.1.5 The availability of a bank of test results creates the possibility of invidious comparisons between schools sectors, regions, States/Territories and different socio-economic groups. While it is clear that measured student achievement (being at least partly determined by relative social advantage and being born into an English-speaking home) tends to be uneven between social groups and uneven between school sectors, the collation of test results reinforces the illusion that the same results can be reasonably expected from anywhere in the school system. This leads to certain condemnation of the teachers and students working in less advantaged social locations, even though the improvement of such students from their starting point might have been very significant.
- 10.1.6 Reliance on external testing as a measure of school performance of efficiency negates the principal of accountability to parents and to the local community.
- 10.1.7 The use of testing programs constitutes a waste of funds at a time when there are many unfulfilled resource needs.
- 10.1.8 Test results do not measure the overall effectiveness of schooling. Test results can be artificially inflated by a concentration on lifting scores at the expenses of a broader education.
- 10.1.9 Standardised testing does not reduce the controversy about schools or standards, but as the US experience shows, it instead perpetuates controversy through never-ending debate about the causes of test scores and the reasons for uneven test 'performance' between different schools and different regions. In such debate the real needs of schools and the real need to improve the curriculum be come totally obscured.
- 10.2 Hence, AEU resolves that in any and every State and Territory where such standardised testing is proposed, it will be resisted through a boycott co-ordinated by the relevant affiliate(s) in conjunction with the AEU.

11. PROFILES AND KEY COMPETENCIES

- 11.1 The AEU notes development in many states concerning student profiling, the development of National Statements and Profiles in the eight 'core' areas of Mathematics, English, Science, Technology, Health, The Arts, Studies of Society and the Environment, and Languages other than English, and the development through the Mayer Committee of Key Competencies in Collecting, analysing and organising information; Communicating ideas and information; Planning and organising activities; Working with others and in teams; Using mathematical ideas and techniques, Solving problems, and Using technology.
- 11.2 The AEU acknowledges that the concept of National Statements and Profiles has wide support, and may be useful.
- 11.3 However, they have not been formulated as a result of widespread and considered consultation. There has been inadequate reference to practising teachers and inadequate collaboration. Consequently, there is no consensus about their content.
- 11.4 The AEU acknowledges the work of the Mayer Committee and accepts that if implemented as outlined in the report, the Key Competencies will provide a useful focus for identifying and reporting relevant employment related competencies.
- 11.5 The collection of data which will occur as a result of the implementation of National Profiles and Key Competency Strands will be considerable and can be used in many ways.
- 11.6 The mere collection and existence of the data is not of itself a rationale for the use of the data for any particular purpose.
- 11.7 The use of the data must be seen as having ethical and educational implications, and the AEU will instruct its members not to assist in the collection of data unless the uses of that data are clearly understood and agreed.

11.8 The AEU accepts that the information on individual students should be used for reporting:

11.8.1 To parents and students, and through them to potential employers and other education providers.

Ownership and control of the individual report must remain with the students.

11.8.2 For diagnostic purposes within the school.

Neither schools nor systems should release information on individual students to other parties without their permission.

11.9 The AEU also accepts that there may be some uses for aggregated information within schools and systems to provide information related to the management of resources and the targeting of remedial action, provided this is done in a way which seeks to overcome disadvantage and provide additional support where it is needed.

The AEU asserts that all such valid uses can be achieved by using sample rather than census data.

11.10 The AEU does not believe that setting school against school, and teacher against teacher, in an attempt to create a 'market' in education is an effective way of producing a quality education system.

The AEU does not believe there is any valid use of the information to:

11.10.1 Publicly identify scores of individual schools, students, or teachers.

11.10.2 Create 'quality' comparisons between schools, students or teachers.

11.10.3 Guide punitive measures against 'failing' schools.

and will therefore resist any attempt to use the information for this purpose, including refusing to collect the information if practicable. The AEU is adamant that testing for these purposes has many undesirable side effects and that their use will not be to the advantage of education as a whole.

- 11.11 The AEU is not convinced of the need for national reporting, but would be prepared to consider proposals provided that they:
- 11.11.1 Were based upon sample and not census;
 - 11.11.2 Did not intend to use the information for the purposes outlined in 11.10 above;
 - 11.11.3 Included equity information as to the participation and achievement of disadvantaged groups;
 - 11.11.4 Could demonstrate a capacity to improve the quality of education in an equitable manner;
 - 11.11.5 Have adequate safeguards against inappropriate use of the information.
- 11.12 The AEU is also aware of a thrust for information which allows for international comparison.

The area of international comparison is still fraught with difficulty and past experience suggests that the figures are open to wide abuse and gross misunderstanding. There are also extreme difficulties in the area of validity.

The AEU has many reservations about the motivations of those calling for international comparison and about the validity of any likely outcome.

However, the AEU would be prepared to consider specific proposals for specific purposes, provided that they:

- 11.12.1 Were based upon sample and not census;
- 11.12.2 Could demonstrate a useful purpose, particularly an intention to constructively remediate any problems identified;
- 11.12.3 Were valid for the specified purposes;
- 11.12.4 Contained adequate safeguards against inappropriate use.

- 11.13 The AEU is opposed to the collection of information for unspecified purposes and rejects the notion that it is possible to create general multi-purpose tests to assess students, schools, systems and teachers.

12. GROUPINGS OF STUDENTS

- 12.1 AEU supports the use of heterogeneous groupings for learning purposes and opposes streaming for the reasons outlined.
- 12.2 Notwithstanding this general policy, the AEU recognises that the need for special education settings still exists for some students with disabilities, and that there is a need to make special provision for students who are being integrated into their own local schools from segregated special education settings. The withdrawal of some other students may also be justified in very specific circumstances, e.g. intensive English for newly arrived migrants.
- 12.3 AEU notes the conceptual confusion, but great political influence, of the notion of 'giftedness'. The concept is usually deeply flawed by connotations of generalised and innate abilities. Thus there are overwhelming inherent problems of measurement and of practical implications.
- 12.4 AEU recognises that there are many people whose performance in a valuable line of human activity can be consistently and repeatedly remarkable. However, the potential for remarkable performance is spread throughout society, and its manifestation is dependent upon complex systems of development, encouragement and opportunity throughout peoples' lives. AEU believes that all people should have access to such development, encouragement and opportunity - the nature of which varies according to individuals' needs, circumstances and aspirations.
- 12.5 Education systems have a responsibility to ensure the full extension of all students through an education which is rich and challenging in both the formal and informal curriculum.

This requires professional development and other support to assist teachers and other school personnel to :

- * understand and meet the individual needs of all students;
- * constructively counter the anti-intellectualism manifest in various ways among some peer groups of students;

- * appropriately facilitate and recognise enthusiasm, hard work and achievement in all valued areas - co-operative work and leadership within the school community; sporting, artistic or academic work; community service and supportive human relationships, and so on.
- 12.6 AEU accepts that students should not be retarded in their development through imposition of an artificial year-level achievement norm. However, the full extension of all students should take place through increased individual attention in the normal classroom. In some cases this will require smaller class sizes and increased relief time from face to face teaching, as well as professional development and other supportive resources.
- 12.7 The AEU opposes the withdrawal of so-called 'gifted' children and the use of accelerated progression. (This does not exclude the provision of extracurricular activities for practices with particular interests). Such practices have detrimental educational and social consequences for those students selected and those not selected. Such labelling of students (as 'gifted' or 'not gifted') limits options and opportunities, and limits self identities and the views others hold of them - it can become self-fulfilling for those labelled 'not gifted' and can create unreal and destructive expectations of those labelled 'gifted'. The inherent problems of defining and measuring 'giftedness' makes such labelling an arbitrary exercise.
- 12.8 The withdrawal of high achieving, creative or highly motivated students from regular classes denies other students the benefits of learning from and sharing in their enthusiasms and achievements. it is well documented that lack of participation by high achieving students has detrimental effects on the academic learning of other students. And all students have much to learn from a peer group which is diverse in cultural and socio-economic background; achievements, interests and aspirations.
- 12.9 The separation of so-called 'gifted' children or high achieving students from other students within schools or between schools (in selective public schools or de facto selective non-government schools) denies those students the powerfully educationally enriching experience of a diverse student peer group.

A uniformity of peers is stultifying; it impedes development of the understanding of the complexities of society, the ability to be adaptable and flexible, and the skills to communicate and have relationships with a wide range of people. This has profoundly damaging consequences for society if people with such a limited school experience move into powerful positions in society (as is often the case) as their experiences limit their capacity to understand and appreciate the circumstances of people unlike themselves and their privileged peers. Such segregation on supposed academic ability groups also serves to artificially perpetuate from generation to generation access to such powerful positions through the route of segregated schooling.

13. PRE-COMPULSORY EDUCATION

- 13.1 All children should have the right to appropriate free public education in the pre-compulsory years.
- 13.2 Pre-school curriculum must be based on the interests and needs of young children and reflect a sound knowledge of child growth and development. In particular, pre-compulsory curriculum should be an extension of, and complementary to, the child's positive experiences in the family. It should recognise the diversity of different family experience and the legitimacy of each child's experience.
- 13.3 There should be close liaison between those providing pre-compulsory and early compulsory education to ensure that their curricula are coherent and complementary, and children whose parents choose not to participate in pre-compulsory education are not discriminated against.
- 13.4 Procedures for close liaison between parents and those providing pre-compulsory education need to be established. The development of more effective parent education in the growth and development of children is also needed.

14. **POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION**

14.1 Increased retention to Year 12, significant social and economic change and continued public debate about Year 12 curriculum and certification and selection into higher education have brought major changes to post compulsory education. The post-compulsory curriculum and certification arrangements throughout the country have undergone substantial renovation in recent years. These changes have exposed a fundamental tension between two different purposes of the post-compulsory years :

14.1.1 Recent years have seen a recognition of the extension of universal comprehensive education to Year 12. All students should be able to successfully complete Year 12 and gain a common single credential at the end of secondary school.

14.1.2 The post-compulsory years have traditionally played a role of sorting and sifting for the purposes of employment and tertiary studies. A hierarchy of courses and credentials have been provided for these various destinations. Such practices have promoted a curriculum directed towards instrumental purposes and have promoted the sorting and tracking of students in the earlier years of secondary schooling.

14.2 AEU asserts a strong commitment to the extension of a general education into the post-compulsory years. Such a general education is not compatible with the possibility of students undertaking broad specialisations, or major areas of study in the post-compulsory years. A general education requires:

15. **CREDENTIALING AND CERTIFICATION**

15.1 As far as possible, the credential(s) issued at the end of secondary schooling should not distort the educational function. For the reasons outlined already in this policy, this requires the abandonment of norm-referenced and external examinations and tests. The emergence of school-based assessment methods for use at the end of Year 12 has been a positive development, but school-based assessment should only be used across the whole student population, rather than being confined to certain schools or students. Otherwise it will be (unjustly) regarded as inferior to external assessment.

- 15.2 The proliferation of different school and TAFE-based credentials has emerged through efforts to create alternative paths for the many students in public education that have been effectively excluded by the traditional academic methods of selection.
- 15.3 However, different credentials inevitably form a credential hierarchy with the traditional academic stream remaining in the dominant position. AEU asserts that the goals of equality of education outcomes and more equal access to higher education are best served by the establishment of a common general secondary credential, encompassing both all schools and Year-12 equivalent TAFE courses.
- 15.4 Until such a common general credential is established, measures should be implemented to increase the portability of and access conferred by existing credentials such as those conferred in TAFE institutions.

16. TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

- 16.1 AEU notes that access to higher education is noticeably unequal by social group. Working class students, Aboriginal students, women in certain courses and public school students are noticeably under-represented by comparison with their total share in the school population and their share of Year 12 students. Yet research shows that these under-represented groups often out-perform other students once they gain access. Inequality of access is particularly obvious in professional courses such as medicine and law.
- 16.2 The inequality is legitimated and reproduced through the present 'merit-based' process of academic selection, which is severely deficient. In reality, it is not based on a psychometric measurement of 'fixed' levels of 'ability' and is skewed in favour of the socially advantaged - such as those in attendance at exclusive private schools.
- 16.3 Higher education maintains a most significant public responsibility. As predominantly vocational and training institutions they provide some members of the society with access to secure, high status careers and the society with important social and economic resources. Consequently they maintain a high degree of public accountability for both their curriculum and for their selection process. Higher education entry policy should be subject to public scrutiny and should not be regarded as the sole province of the universities and colleges. AEU strongly asserts that major changes should be made to entrance policies on a system wide basis.

- 16.4 All students who successfully complete Year 12 should have the right to undertake a course of tertiary studies. This right will only be realised through governments meeting their funding responsibilities such that the number of tertiary places will cater for the total demand. This requires a major expansion of public finance for higher education in order to meet unmet demand. AEU opposes the extension of 'user charges' such as tuition fees and special graduate taxation. Tertiary education must remain a public responsibility not an individual responsibility. Only some graduates are able to translate their qualifications into high earnings. The individual benefits of such qualifications should be recouped through the general taxation system, not a specific graduate tax which would discriminate against the disadvantaged and discourage the extension of participation in tertiary education.
- 16.5 Efforts must be made to increase the level of participation in tertiary studies of Aboriginal people and people from other groups (including students from ethnic backgrounds) currently under-represented in tertiary studies and in particular tertiary faculties. This can be achieved through the use of sub quotas, special entry schemes and through a substantial renovation to tertiary admissions processes. Such sub-quotas should include 50 per cent sex-based quotas in faculties where women are substantially under-represented, such as engineering, and should also include quotas that progressively increase the percentage of students drawn from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, including families earning less than average weekly earnings.
- 16.6 AEU calls for radical reforms to the tertiary admissions process which will involve:
- 16.6.1 The abandonment of the use of a single aggregate score.
 - 16.6.2 A movement towards the use of school based assessment.
 - 16.6.3 The establishment of public and more extensive criteria for admissions to particular faculties.
 - 16.6.4 The use of other measures to ensure a more equal social mix of students undertaking tertiary studies.
- 16.7 Specifically AEU calls for an admissions process which:
- 16.7.1 Will extend the admissions process back into the academic year.

- 16.7.2 Is based on an extensive process rather than a point in time selection.
- 16.7.3 Involves a process of mutual selection between students and tertiary institutions based upon the continuous exchange of more extensive and relevant information.
- 16.7.4 Will involve the use of more extensive criteria both academic and social.
- 16.7.5 Will be supported by sub quotas to ensure adequate representation of all groups in tertiary studies.
- 16.7.6 Provides increased places to mature age students in higher education, selected on the basis of interview and other criteria, providing a second chance for previously excluded or ineligible students.
- 16.7.7 Provides extended special entry schemes and continued support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students.
- 16.8 The Tertiary Admissions Process should be supported by a system of delayed entry or queuing and delayed selection at the end of the first year of tertiary studies for the more competitive courses.
- 16.9 AEU supports establishment of entry paths from TAFE institutions to higher education through credits for work completed and the provision of appropriate bridging and remedial courses.
- 16.10 AEU opposes credentialing procedures where the opportunity to secure higher education-related credentials is provided to only part of the Year 12 student population, and AEU also opposes the use by individual universities and colleges of separate entrance examinations.
- 16.11 AEU notes that in order to achieve changes to higher education entrance policies it may be necessary for the Commonwealth Government to intervene, using its financial powers. AEU calls for the establishment of a National Inquiry into Selection for Higher Education in order to focus public attention on the need for more equal access and the policy changes required to achieve it.

17. TRANSITION TO WORK

- 17.1 AEU supports the study of work and labour-market and industrial relations issues within the school curriculum and encourages a curriculum which will enhance the ability of people to exert some control over their working lives.
- 17.2 All students (and not just intending school leavers) should be provided with work experience, careers counselling and information about supply and demand in the labour market.

18. CONTROL OF CURRICULUM AND DECISION-MAKING

- 18.1 AEU reaffirms its support for school-based democratic control of curriculum, within the framework of the system-wide principles outlined in this policy. School policy-making bodies should be composed of representatives of parents, teachers and, where appropriate, students. They should have significant powers and the necessary resource capacity to develop curriculum, according to general systemic guidelines and the needs of the school community.
- 18.2 Further, the development of a democratic public education system in Australia requires similar representative structures at State and Federal levels. At each of these levels, decision-making processes and structures should reflect the cultural, economic and social diversity of the groups they serve.
- 18.3 At the classroom level, teachers and students should develop and practice democratic procedures for selecting learning experiences, within the framework of the syllabus.
- 18.4 AEU calls for discussion and debate amongst affiliates, governments and public authorities on the appropriate allocation of powers and responsibilities for control of the public education system at school, State/Territory and Commonwealth levels.

19. ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION

- 19.1 AEU asserts that accountability through democratic procedures confers more real power on parents and the community than accountability through market mechanisms ('voting with the feet'). Student withdrawal is a severe sanction of last resort and can only be applied at the expense of the stability of the student's education. It does not confer the power to influence the day-to-day educational practice of the school.
- 19.2 Each system, school and classroom should be accountable for its curriculum to staff, students, parents, its wider community and the agreed general guidelines. (For classrooms, the wider community includes the school, and for the school it includes the system).
- 19.3 Meaningful accountability cannot occur unless curriculum and curriculum education decisions are made using democratic procedures, and the decisions which are made are available to everyone.
- 19.4 AEU believes that evaluation should apply to all sections of education systems and that the same principles should apply throughout.
- 19.5 Evaluation must be seen as a tool to inform the process of decision-making among all parties including administrators, and to facilitate improvement in schools and education systems. Evaluation should also be seen as a learning process through which policy decisions are grounded in reflection on practical experience, and thus policy and practice are continuously connected.

Evaluation should be as much concerned with analysing the content and processes of the curriculum as with identifying the quality of student learning.

- 19.6 Teacher expertise and experience should be central to the process of democratic curriculum evaluation. However, evaluation should be seen as a legitimate concern of all parties within the school community - teachers, parents, students and administration. Evaluation should be open to the participation of all these parties at all stages of the process, and be conducted in an atmosphere of trust and respect by being supportive, constructive and non-judgmental.
- 19.7 Evaluation should be conducted within principles of procedures that protect the rights of individuals involved.

- 19.8 AEU believes that, on request, schools should have access to curriculum support personnel and resources to assist in improving their capacity to undertake self evaluation.
- 19.9 It follows from this policy of democratic school self-evaluation that there is no place for external inspection of schools.
- 19.10 Methods of evaluation based on measured outcomes (such as competency testing) are also rejected because of their undesirable educational consequences and because they do not provide the broad range of information needed to make informed local judgements about the overall work of the school.

20. SUPPORT SERVICE AND RESOURCES

- 20.1 AEU asserts that curriculum support structures at local, regional or State/Territory level should be developed and provided in response to school-level requirements.
- 20.2 Such services should include a range of experienced advisers and consultants, and research services. Teachers should be encouraged to take up advisory positions and the experience gained should be recognised when they return to schools.
- 20.3 This AEU Curriculum Policy should be considered in conjunction with the AEU Policy on In-Service Education (Professional Development) adopted in January 1984.
- 20.4 Schools should be provided with sufficient funding, physical resources, and personnel to facilitate school-based curriculum development within the framework set down in this policy. It is essential that adequate time should be made available to both teachers and parents for the implementation of school-based curriculum development, evaluation and assessment.

Attachment 2

“Gifted, streamed and mixed-ability programs for gifted students: Impact on self-concept, motivation, and achievement” paper by Craven, Marsh, and Print, Australian Journal of Education, Vol 44, No. 1, 2000, pp. 51-75