



AISV'S RESPONSE TO THE SEX DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT (TEACHING PROFESSION) BILL 23 April 2004

AISV is pleased to respond to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee's call for submissions on the *Sex Discrimination Amendment (Teaching Profession) Bill 2004*.

Recent community debate on the gender imbalance in the teaching profession is likely to stimulate constructive suggestions of ways to attract more men into teaching. This debate presents an opportunity to challenge stereotypes of the teaching profession, particularly relating to male teachers at primary school level.

AISV's response is based on consultations with member schools. AISV represents 98 per cent of Victoria's 215 independent schools and their more than 100,000 students. These schools offer a diverse range of programs, educational philosophies and learning environments. Independent schools are located all over Victoria, in regional centres, low socio-economic suburbs and affluent areas. The independent sector is diverse and caters to a variety of communities, with different needs, beliefs and educational philosophies.

Despite their many differences, these schools have highlighted a consistent need for more male teachers, especially in the early years of schooling. As one school said,

*"We would love to have more male teachers as we are heavily imbalanced.
We have one male teacher who is our music teacher."*

Our research (and anecdotal experience with schools) suggests that the gender imbalance impacts differently on students from school to school. One school, located in a regional centre stated that many of their male students have grown up on farms, and respond well to male teachers. Another school cited its reluctance to take on more challenging students without the appropriate gender balance within its teaching staff. In other cases, schools are concerned by the lack of male role models in both the school and the home.

A number of schools have also expressed their concern that the proportion of male teachers would continue to decline if no new, positive measures are put in place to counter the trend.

1. CONSULTATION WITH MEMBER SCHOOLS

AISV contacted Member Schools just prior to the first week of term two. A short survey was designed to address the key points of the Bill and those explored in the *Bills Digest*. A copy of the survey is attached for reference.

Over thirty schools responded to the survey. The range of schools was very broad and included those in metropolitan Melbourne, greater Melbourne and regional centres, those with particular educational philosophies and religious beliefs as well as single sex schools and coeducational schools. While the responses do represent a cross-section of the independent school community, they only provide a snapshot of the sector. The feedback received reinforced the urgency of this issue, the range of needs among independent schools and provided insights into the ways that schools would like to see the imbalance addressed.

The responses also emphasised the need for a targeted approach. There not only exists a need for males to enter the teaching profession, but a specific need for more males in primary school classrooms. The principal of a boys' school highlighted that they had a greater ratio of male to female teachers in their senior school but only a third of their primary school staff were male. Other schools suggested that there must be incentives to encourage men to continue their career in the classroom rather than swiftly rise through the ranks to a senior position with limited student contact.

Responses to the question of whether schools would offer gender-based scholarships were mixed. There seems a general appreciation that the scholarships would form one part of a broader strategy to attract men into the teaching profession in greater numbers. While a number of respondents were staunchly opposed to male-only scholarships, others feared a further decline in the number of male teachers in their school and expressed a willingness to try anything that might curb this trend.

2. RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS

2.1 Issues and concerns in relation to the gender imbalance in the teaching profession

What cannot be questioned is the need for more male teachers, particularly in the primary years of learning. This was a consistent concern raised by those who responded to AISV's survey and was evident even among those opposed to the proposal for gender-based scholarships. A number of schools cited recent experiences where job advertisements had yielded exclusively female applicants.

"There were no male applicants to the last three positions we advertised."

"There are no male teachers in the primary school. We recently appointed a female teacher to our primary school for which we had 12 female applicants and no male applicants."

"Every job ad brings in many quality female applicants and very few male applicants."

Even schools that considered their current balance adequate noted the challenges of maintaining this balance.

"Most male teachers are over 50, so in 10 years' time when they have retired, the situation will be even more critical. We need to do something about it NOW."

"The school is happy with its ratio, although the small number of males applying for positions limits our ability to maintain the ratio."

2.2 The advantages of a gender balanced teaching profession

In responding to these questions, some schools noted that the male presence in their school influences their capacity to enrol students with particular needs. For example,

"Having had a vibrant and resourceful male teacher from 2001 to 2003 it was noted that we could take on boys who needed a different approach to discipline and learning that this male teacher was able to provide through male (sporting) activities."

"We do have some secondary boys who require extra assistance from the male teachers because they do not have male role models at home."

Another school cited its reluctance to take on more challenging students without the appropriate gender balance within its teaching staff.

"We have a lot of enquiries from parents of boys not fitting into mainstream schooling looking for an alternative. Without a male teacher we tend to take on less challenging enrolments [particularly] boys in older age groups."

In addressing whether the gender imbalance is a disadvantage or not, respondents did not tend to focus on student learning as much as they emphasised the social need for male role models. This kind of response was evident amongst regional, suburban and metropolitan schools alike and was exhibited in responses from schools with vastly different educational philosophies. A number of pertinent comments follow.

"Positive male role modelling and communication between boys and male staff would be an advantage to our male students."

"Boys do not have male role models in their lives as many come from single parent families. In the community there is a lack of suitable male role models."

"I am concerned that primary-age students (particularly those from broken or mother-only families) do not have adult male role models."

"The important thing is that the children have good male role models. Boys do relate better to our male staff in particular matters."

"Students need male role models, especially teenage boys."

"I think this is difficult to quantify. Our primary staff have indicated on many occasions that they would love to have a male teaching presence in the primary section. Boys who only have a mum at home would benefit greatly from interacting with male role models in the classroom."

Interestingly, some girls' schools were also concerned by the lack of male role modelling.

"We have concerns that our students have few male role models in their lives but we have no evidence suggesting that this is a disadvantage."

"It is just as important that girls have male teachers as boys - and vice versa."

"Our female students have sometimes specifically sought out pastoral care support from male teachers - of which there are few."

Typical with the patterns evident at boys' and coeducational schools, the principal of one girls' school noted that students did not have a male teacher until high school.

"Some students find it difficult with male staff at first and hence I believe it is really important that we have a good mix."

Conversely, another girls' school stated,

"No disadvantage at all, particularly as we are a girls' school, but no difference noted between male and female teachers."

The lack of males taking on positions as Integration Aides for students with disabilities was cited as a matter of concern by one school. In this instance, the school had a comparably high male to female ratio and the students requested a male Integration Aide.

"Finding males for Integration Aide work is difficult because of salaries - our boys have been wanting a male Aide for some time, now achieved."

The lack of male teachers also poses administrative problems, including the coordination of school camps and even, as one girls' school noted, in maintaining staff collegiality.

"The lack of male teachers in the junior school makes sport and camps difficult to staff. Also lack of a male role models means many students reach senior school without ever having had a male teacher."

"Balance does not present problems for classes ... however, it is important to have a critical number to ensure collegial support for male and female staff."

2.3 Responses to the proposal for gender-based scholarships

Responses to the question of whether schools might offer gender-based scholarships produced a range of answers: yes, no and maybe. The "maybe" group included schools that did not have a gender imbalance at present but suggested they might offer scholarships if they encountered one in the future.

"If we were down to only one male teacher or less, yes we would consider this as a viable option to encourage male staff."

"Yes - to build up more male contact for students, especially in the early year classes."

Other schools noted their interest but explained their inability to afford such a scheme.

"As a small independent school we would not offer alone but would join with others."

Those against scholarships cited their concerns with regard to positive discrimination and intimated that an emphasis on gender would detract from quality teaching.

"I am opposed to this kind of discrimination. Just as I support merit selection based on merit not gender, I oppose supporting males against females for scholarships."

"I want quality teachers in front of our students, regardless of what gender they are."

"I do not think this would have a lasting impact on the situation in schools."

While the survey responses indicate that the Victorian independent schools sector would not unanimously support gender-based scholarships, the Bill would enable those interested in this approach to do so. Both those in favour and those against the scholarships would agree that no single approach would balance the profession. It should not be assumed that schools in favour of the scholarships would use this tactic in isolation. Each of the schools in favour also provided other alternatives to attract more men into teaching.

2.4 Other suggestions of projects that the Government could undertake to make the teaching profession more attractive to males

Respondents provided a number of positive suggestions for change. The majority cited the low salaries, particularly for more senior teachers, as an issue for both men and women. Respondents also cited the lack of prestige as a deterrent. Many suggested that the profession would benefit from a "makeover" and that a vast promotional campaign might go some way in improving the profession's image.

"Teaching needs a general image makeover, partly related to salary levels but more to do with its prestige in society and the degree of influence and leadership teachers are seen to have."

"Promotional campaigns for the profession as a whole - not only aimed at males."

"Raise the profile of teaching as a profession in our culture."

A few schools suggested that such a campaign should emphasise the importance of teaching and its capacity to "change lives" and to "make a difference".

Other schools suggested that there should be incentives for those considering a change in career.

"Scholarships for mid-career professionals to consider teaching as a career - men and women. Many are interested in teaching but cannot afford a whole year without an income."

"Strategies to attract those in other professions to teaching, and setting realistic qualification guidelines are worthy of consideration."

Another suggested that the best way for male students to consider a teaching career is to see other males in the role, enjoying their jobs and recommended a visiting teacher program.

"The best way is to let them see men in this role and enjoying their job. Perhaps a visiting teacher program provided by male teachers"

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

One fact that cannot be disputed is the overwhelming need for a solution to this issue. Most of the independent schools that took part in this survey noted their concern about the gender imbalance. Those that do not presently experience problems related to a gender imbalance predicted difficulties in sustaining their current balance.

Survey responses also highlighted that it is not as simple as attracting men to the teaching profession but that a more specific approach for the early years of schooling is also required. In this case, there needs to be incentives for men to stay in teaching roles, rather than move to more senior roles in the school where their contact with students is limited. It could similarly be argued that women need to be encouraged to take on leadership positions in schools.

While responses to AISV's survey on the issue suggested that each school would manage the gender imbalance differently, this simply reflects the diverse needs of schools and students within the independent sector. If the Bill successfully passes through Parliament, it would enable those interested in offering gender-based scholarships to do so. The Bill's broad definition of a "scholarship" would also provide schools an opportunity to develop an approach specifically suited to their needs. Having only one solution to this issue cannot be considered an appropriate, or indeed relevant, way forward for all.

The responses suggest that no school believes this, in itself, is enough to address the imbalance. It seems that a number of schools would use this measure, alongside others, to attract more men into the teaching profession, or more specifically, into their school. To this extent the Bill would broaden the options available to schools seeking to counter the gender imbalance and may provide a welcome addition to strategies already in place.

AUSTRALIAN SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE
Inquiry into the *Sex Discrimination Amendment (Teaching Profession) Bill 2004*

AISV QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CONSULTATION WITH MEMBERS

Responses to the following questions will provide the basis for AISV's submission to the inquiry. Answers may be as short or as long as each school considers necessary. Responses are requested by **4pm, Wednesday 21 April** and should be forwarded to Rachel Howard, Public Affairs Officer, at rachel.howard@ais.vic.edu.au or by fax on 9826 6066.

Name: _____ **Position title:** _____
School: _____ **Contact Number:** _____

1. Does your school have any issues or concerns in relation to a gender imbalance amongst teaching staff? If possible, please provide the number of male and female teachers on your staff.

2. If your school has a good ratio of male to female teachers, then please explain how your school has achieved and maintained this. Has your school noted any advantages relating to the gender of a teacher and student learning, particularly in the case of male students? Please provide examples where possible (these may be applied as case studies if a submission is prepared).

3. If your school has a particularly low ratio of male to female teachers, then please provide some suggestions of what governments might be able to do to assist a more balanced ratio in your school. Has your school noted any disadvantages relating to the gender imbalance and student learning, particularly in the case of male students? Please provide examples where possible (these may be applied as case studies if a submission is prepared).

4. If the Bill's passage through the Australian Parliament is successful and education organisations are able to offer male-only teacher scholarships, would your school wish to do so? Why/Why not? (Please note: under the provisions of the Bill a "scholarship" would be broadly defined as including "assistance or support that is similar to a scholarship".)

5. Can you provide any other suggestions on what projects the Government could undertake to make the teaching profession more attractive to males, particularly male students at your school?

6. Please list any other points you consider also relevant to the inquiry.

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