



Australian Council of
Deans of Education Inc.

The Secretary,
MCEETYA
PO Box 202
Carlton South Vic 3053 Australia

3 October 2008

Please find enclosed a copy of the submission for the draft of the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. We thank you for this opportunity to be able to respond.

Professor Sue Willis
President

Professor Peter Renshaw
Secretary/Treasurer

The Australian Council of Deans of Education welcomes the draft of the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. There is much in the draft that we endorse - in particular:

- (i) the focus on and commitment to closing the gap in learning achievement for Indigenous Australians;
- (ii) the commitment to promoting equity for all students by providing additional support for disadvantaged groups;
- (iii) the commitment to strengthening early childhood education quality and opportunities;
- (iv) the focus on the middle years of schooling as requiring a distinctive educational approach.

We also support the broadening of the Learning Areas (from an earlier draft that was circulated) to include Humanities and Social Sciences, and the inclusion of Environmental Sustainability as part of the multidisciplinary perspectives. We note, however, that the distinction between "disciplines" per se and "multidisciplinary perspectives" remains unclear and clearly a matter of convenience rather than a well-developed analytical approach to curriculum.

We have specific reservations, in particular with regard to:

- (i) 3d. Improving the quality of teaching and school leadership. The substance and tone of the recommendations are quite negative in our view and reinforce the current campaign to blame teachers rather than to acknowledge their positive achievements as professionals and hold them accountable for their successes and the challenges they face and support them more proactively. .

The statement "getting the right people to become teachers" implies a "one size fits all" approach to teacher recruitment. The diversity of contexts and communities within which teachers educate children needs to be highlighted. The teaching profession is the largest professional group in the nation and

ideally it should reflect the diversity of the population and present to students the embodiment of Australia as a multicultural society. The cultural and personal resources that teachers bring with them into the classroom are crucial in linking curriculum content to students' background knowledge and experience. Diversity is vital at a systems level to enable teachers collectively to reach out to the multitude of different learners within schools.

The statement "developing them into effective instructors" is a reductive approach to the complexity of teachers' professional work. Is this notion of "instructor" relevant to early childhood? We would suggest that it silences the core of the professional work of teachers during the early years where the whole child and his/her development across all domains should be the centre of education. Are the broad and developmental goals with regard to the middle years of schooling captured in the notion of instructor? Again we suggest an inherent conflict between the declaration on middle years and the reductive notion of teacher as "instructor".

The dot-points following "We commit to recruiting high calibre...etc." continues a tone of negativity and implied criticism with regard to the teaching profession and to pre-service teacher education. We draw the attention of the panel to the House of Representative Report, *Top of the Class*, and to the overall positive appraisal of teacher education programs by that committee. We reject as uninformed the implied criticism of Universities with regard to the practicum experience. The richness of the practicum experiences currently being offered and the on-going commitment of Universities to ensuring quality and diversity of practicum experiences needs to be acknowledged. We would be happy to provide further information on this element of the teacher education programs.

The consistent use of "student performance" rather than "student learning" or "student development" is also unfortunate because it directs attention away from the fundamental goals of education to concerns about how things "appear" - performance is more about display and ranking, foregrounding learning and development places real change and authenticity at the centre of the educational enterprise.

The final dot - career opportunities, acknowledgement and incentives for teachers - is a welcome after-thought to the tone of this section which is based on a top-down model of change and leadership. There is little acknowledgement of the professional attributes and collective commitment that teachers have demonstrated to generations of Australian children.

(ii) 3g. The opening paragraph of the section on assessment confuses assessment (for, as and of learning) with national testing and evaluation of schooling systems and processes. It would be clearer if this paragraph were removed. It is also surprising that the negative impacts of a pre-occupation with comprehensive national testing are not highlighted in this declaration. There is no research demonstrating that national testing per se improves learning and there is research showing that national testing promotes curriculum narrowing and various non-productive practices such as time-consuming coaching of students for the test so that apparent performance levels of schools and systems appears positive.



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