



AEU Submission to the Australia 2020 Summit

TOPIC 2: The productivity agenda – Education, Skills, Training, Science and Innovation
--

What are the key policy issues challenging Australian schools for the decade ahead?

Answering this question correctly is vital to Australia's future. It means improving educational outcomes overall, reducing under-achievement and increasing participation by the most disadvantaged children and young people.

Raising the achievement bar and closing the social gap is central to the achievement of the Government's goal of strengthening national productivity and inclusion in the interests of our national well-being and international competitiveness. The key means to meet this challenge are addressed in this submission to the 2020 forum by the Australian Education Union.

Free, secular, universally accessible public education remains the key for a vibrant, socially cohesive and prosperous Australia. Social cohesion and multiculturalism are brought to life in our inclusive, socially representative public schools where we encourage students regardless of racial, ethnic, religious or class background to reflect their best and strive for individual excellence for the common good.

All students should be guaranteed access to a rigorous, rich and rewarding curriculum aimed at equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21st century. A curriculum guarantee would provide all students, regardless of where they live or their socio economic background, with the chance to pursue the widest range of opportunities in life. This can only be made possible with a highly qualified, well paid teaching service.

Quality teaching, professional pay and adequate resources are the means to improve our public schools and the outcomes of students. The first step is to ensure a competitive professional salary for all teachers so that we continue to attract and retain teachers in sufficient numbers. Beyond that there needs to be further recognition and reward for quality teaching, knowledge skills and practice. Governments need to ensure there is a qualified teacher in every classroom across the nation, wherever it is located. Staffing systems where market forces advantage some schools and students at the cost of others are simply unacceptable.

Early Childhood Education must be free and equitably accessible to all. Ideally ECE services should be co-located with public primary schools or linked with school services. Greater cooperation between Commonwealth and State and Territory is required to achieve this. A considerable increase in the qualified ECE workforce is needed, and the immediate implementation of the proposed National Early Years Workforce Strategy is a priority. As Indigenous children are under-represented in ECE, the commitment of the Rudd Labor Government to prioritise Indigenous children's access to ECE is welcome and essential.

A well-resourced public TAFE system is vital to the future of the Australian economy and society. ALP policy endorses a critical central role for the public TAFE system in the VET sector in addressing skills shortages and promoting its social inclusion agenda. Further competition within the TAFE and VET sector will not enhance the Commonwealth Government's capacity to address the current skills shortages, nor to plan for future economic and social needs of the workforce.