



*Bridging
the Gap*

Appendix 1

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

REPORT TO THE PARLIAMENTS OF AUSTRALIA

From

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT FORUM (NEEF)

Bridging the Gap – The role of education in overcoming the increasing distance between the haves and the have nots.

NEEF consisted of forums in five State capitals – Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney – and a National Forum in Brisbane, between October 2000 and August 2001.

It brought together a diverse group of prominent Australians, business people, welfare executives and workers, public administrators, educators including principals, teachers and students from public, independent and Catholic schools and from TAFE, academics, indigenous Australians, people from ethnic communities and politicians from the major parties.

The **PROPOSALS FOR ACTION** in this brochure are the major recommendations that came out of the series of forums.

THE KEY MESSAGE OF THE FORUMS IS THAT THERE IS AN URGENT NEED TO INVEST MORE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA. AN EXTRA \$1.5 BILLION PER ANNUM FOR AT LEAST EACH OF THE NEXT THREE YEARS IS REQUIRED.

This is a call to:

- State and Federal governments
- to the business community and
- to all Australians

To take action to provide a better education for all Australians, particularly those who are disadvantaged. These requests are urgent. They should be implemented as soon as possible to achieve a just and equitable society and a robust and sustainable economy. Failure to address these proposals will lead to increasing social division, chronic welfare dependency and the accelerating erosion of public educational services across the Australian community threatening further discontent and disengagement.

NEEF is
co-ordinated by

The World
Education
Fellowship
Australian
Council

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We call on all political parties contesting the coming election to commit to

PROPOSALS

1 INVEST MORE IN EDUCATION

The Federal and State governments and the business community should invest more in education at all levels with the confident expectation that the return on such investment will justify the increased expenditure. Governments must retain current revenue bases rather than erode them by cuts to taxation. Optimally, the Federal Government should commit itself through an Education Pact between parliament and the people to an increase in revenue which will be applied specifically to education. \$1.5 billion per annum for each of the next three years is essential.

2 DIRECT FUNDS TO THOSE IN GREATEST NEED

The increased investment in education should be used both to enhance existing effective initiatives and priorities, and particularly to start new and different initiatives. 'More of the same' is not the solution. Governments must target at least 60% of this new funding in particular to people and communities in greatest need because of the relative disadvantages or disabilities they suffer.

3 USE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO PROVIDE DIVERSE 'PATHWAYS'

'Educational experiences and opportunities provided to Australians of all ages should be broader, more varied and more flexible to cater for diverse backgrounds and abilities. Schools and vocational education and training institutions should be integrated into community learning centres and provide employment and career advice, child-care, welfare support services, and family and community development. Stronger partnerships between learning centres, parents, government agencies, business, welfare groups and volunteers will make this possible.

4 PROVIDE MORE EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO OUR TEACHERS

Teachers need and deserve enhanced professional status and conditions, better initial preparation and more effective 'in service' development. \$75 million in each of the next three budgets should be set aside to provide more intensive and targeted development programs, to deal with information technology in their curricula, with the education of indigenous and disadvantaged students, and with the 'know how' to work co-operatively with teacher aides, parents, community welfare officers and other human service professionals. Building positive relationships among all stakeholders of education is a priority.

5 TARGET EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND YOUNG FAMILIES

More extensive early intervention in the development of our children, especially those who are disadvantaged and those actually or potentially 'at risk' is imperative. We need integrated education, social welfare and community services in the pre-school years 0-5 to ensure that the life-long growth of our children is not prejudiced or permanently flawed, even before they commence primary school. Better tax support for parents is required.

6 BRIDGE THE 'DIGITAL DIVIDE' BY INVESTING MORE IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Lack of access to information technology is creating a group of "information poor" Australians who are increasingly unable to participate effectively, or at all, in the emerging knowledge economy. To prevent the entrenchment of a "digital divide" urgent action is required by governments to take dramatic steps to improve access to information by: installing high speed Internet connections in all classrooms/learning spaces and community service venues; providing systematic training in all schools in standard computing applications; integrating information technology into all aspects of the curriculum; fostering the development of local content and material in courseware and curricula.

7 INTENSIVELY SUPPORT INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

The acute disadvantages suffered by most Indigenous Australians require a proportionately greater investment in education and development. We need to provide: Indigenous role models in education (both teachers and principals); 500 scholarships to young Indigenous people to attract them into the teaching profession; training for all teachers – Indigenous and non indigenous – in cultural studies so that they can teach all their students about the culture and history of Indigenous Australians; and involvement of parents and members of the Indigenous communities in the transmission of local cultures within the schooling system.

the implementation of these proposals in the first budget after the election

EXPLANATIONS

Australia is NOT a high-taxing or high-spending country. Our spending on education at all levels is 5.3% of GDP. This is below the OECD average and below 9 other comparative OECD countries. We can afford to invest more in education. Tax cuts now will deprive Federal and State governments of the funds needed for education. Hardest hit by this will be public schools and TAFE which has already experienced a 10% reduction in funding per teaching hour between 1997 and 1999. Public educational services will be run down and 'social exclusion' will increase.

Disadvantage in Australia:

2.4 million Australians – or 13.3% – live in poverty. 732,000 dependent children live in poverty. Incomes of poor families are, on average, 43% below the poverty line 50% of Australia's poor live in families whose main source of income is Government cash benefits. Youth Allowance payments for singles under 21 fall well below their poverty line. By the age of 24 early school-leavers (not completing Year 12) have TWICE the unemployment rate of school completers.

The 'bottom 20%' of students are least successfully negotiating schooling or post-schooling education or training. Completion rates have declined from 77% in 1992 to 72% in 1999. Indigenous completion rates hover around 32%. Teachers in 'isolated' schools cannot provide all the social support required. Involvement of parents, teachers' aides who visit families, and community welfare workers should be integrated with schools into community learning centres where parents and adults can access 'lifelong learning'. The 'full service school' model must become the norm rather than the exception. Opportunities for secondary students to mix some schooling, some work and some vocational education and training experiences as 'pathways' into meaningful employment are essential and should be valued as much as the 'academic' pathway leading to university. The recommendations of the Eldridge Report (Jan 2001) "Footprints to the Future" – Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce should be implemented.

Teaching is an increasingly ageing and feminized profession (eg Average age of Queensland teachers = 47). Teachers bear the front-line responsibility for delivering learning opportunities to students of all ages. We need to attract more males, and more persons with work experience outside teaching into the profession through scholarships to complete initial training and more competitive remuneration. They need comprehensive and systematic 'in-service' training to assist them to integrate Information and Communication Technologies into their curricula. The recommendations of the Ramsey Report in NSW should be extended across all States. Teachers are often those to whom students in distress turn. They need access to knowledge, referral points and support systems to assist them to respond effectively to the students' families and the students showing signs of distress which may lead to early school leaving.

Investment in prevention will be more effective than later, expensive efforts at remediation. We invest less than comparable OECD countries in early childhood education. Identifying problems in families through early intervention for children from birth to 4 years is essential. This needs the involvement of parents, teachers and teacher aides working with children through home visitation. Positive child-adult and adult-adult relationships are essential. Prevention efforts should include adequate financial support through tax incentives or child endowment to allow mothers to give necessary care to children under 4 years. Parents should receive tax relief in the form of \$2000 per child to their tax-free threshold in the first budget of the next government.

Research shows students' access to Information and Communication Technologies depends on economic status and education of the parents. Those already disadvantaged because of low socio-economic status will be doubly disadvantaged because of their inability to share in the new economy either economically through work in high skill jobs or socially through accessing information, transactions and communication through Information and Communication Technologies. "Communication and information technologies are the new currency of power and our students have a need to know how to operate in that currency and a right to do so" (Ryan 2000). Access to computers and to the internet is required in every learning space as a basic standard in all schools. Teachers need further and deeper training in the use of ICT in all subjects of the curriculum. For students finding difficulties in learning, information and Communication Technologies based education may assist them to learn in new and different ways especially in developing better numeracy skills.

40% of the Indigenous population is currently under 15 years of age. Indigenous youths between 15 and 25 are 9 times more likely to be in prison than their white Australian counterparts. 5.8% of indigenous youth in this age-group are in prison. This is a generation under threat. Different responses are required for urban-suburban, regional-provincial town and remote-community groups. Involvement of the local parents and elders in each location is required to provide cultural knowledge and promote self-identity and a sense of achievement. Attendance problems raise the need for a 'whole-of-community' approach to education for children and youth. Targeted provisions of scholarships to young indigenous to become teachers are urgently required and the wider spread of successful strategies is urgent.

The Proposals for Action summarised in this brochure are explained and supported in a major report from the NEEF project. Besides input from the speakers and participants in the NEEF State and national forums, this report is based on research from:

- > The National Centre for Social and Economic Modeling University of Canberra (NATSEM)
- > The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)
- > The Smith Family
- > The Australian College of Education
- > Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra (DETYA)
- > Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, Monash University
- > The Dusseldorp Skills Foundation
- > Berry Street, Victoria
- > The Eldridge Report

This brochure will be presented to all politicians in the Federal and State Parliaments of Australia and the major report from the NEEF project will be sent to representative members of Parliament from each of the major parties with the request that it be tabled and debated in each Parliament and that the Proposals for Action be implemented as a result of decisions to be taken by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and enabled by consistent legislation in the Federal and each State Parliament.

Patron of NEEF:

- > The Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia (present and immediate past)

NEEF recognises the support and contribution from:

- > Anglicare, Western Australia
- > Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS)
- > Australian Scholarships Group – Friendly Society Ltd
- > Business corporations (IBM, Boeing)
- > Catholic Education Commission, Queensland
- > Catholic Education Department, Victoria
- > Commerce Queensland
- > Department of Employment and Training, Queensland
- > Department of Education and Training, NSW
- > Department of Education, Employment & Training, Victoria
- > Department of Families, Queensland
- > Dusseldorp Skills Forum
- > Education Queensland
- > Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP)
- > Greater Brisbane Area Consultative Committee (DEWRBSB)
- > Hall Chadwick Queensland
- > International Council of Social Welfare
- > NSW Council of Social Services
- > Queensland Council of Social Services
- > SA Council of Social Services
- > The Australian College of Education
- > The Smith Family
- > The Indigenous community
- > University of Queensland
- > Victorian Council of Social Services
- > Western Australian Department of Training
- > Western Australian Council of Social Service

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- > Monash University, Victoria
- > National Institute of Labour Studies, SA
- > Organization for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD)
- > Queensland University of Technology
- > Recruitment and Consulting Services Association
- > Representatives from Federal Government, Opposition, Democrats
- > State politicians
- > Secondary school principals
- > Students from Public, Catholic, Independent schools
- > Telstra



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